

CO: Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Monday, April 16, 2018

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Please see attached Cabinet Office's Transcript of Provincial Question Period for Monday, April 16, 2018.

MCI did not receive any questions of interest

MSA: MPP Forster mentioned a low income senior couple in Thorold whose house appliances to blew up at their residence and have requested that Hydro One take responsibility and compensate them for the damages. Minister Thibeault responded by saying that similar claims have been made by others from the same complex in Thorold and that Hydro One will be assessing each claim.

Official opposition questions focused on the Hydro Rate Reduction Plan, gas prices, auto insurance rates, Hydro One's CEO salary, the 2018 Budget and surgery wait times. NDP Questions also looked at auto insurance rates, revisited hospital overcrowding, compensation to a Thorold couple for damages to appliances, and auto workers' access to leave days.

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

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

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 3rd Session
Monday, April 16, 2018

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

Table of Contents

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault
Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Gelinas to Minister Naqvi
Re: Hospital Overcrowding

MPP McNaughton to Minister Sousa (Ballard)
Re: Gas Prices

MPP Gates to Minister Sousa
Re: Auto Insurance Rates

MPP Rinaldi to Minister Flynn
Re: Minimum Wage Increase

MPP Cho to Minister Sousa
Re: Auto Insurance Rates

MPP Sattler to Minister Naidoo-Harris
Re: Hospital Overcrowding

MPP Dong to Minister Milczyn
Re: Poverty Reduction Strategy

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault
Re: Hydro One CEO Salary

MPP Forster to Minister Thibeault
Re: Hydro One Compensation

MPP Martins to Minister Naqvi
Re: Legal Aid Investments

MPP Clark to Premier Wynne
Re: 2018 Budget

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

MPP Potts to Minister Zimmer
Re: Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation in Ontario

MPP Yurek to Premier Wynne
Re: Surgery Wait-Times

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Todd Smith: Thanks, Speaker and good morning. Glad to see you made it ok. My question is to the Minister of energy. After the auditor general raised concerns about the government's hydro scheme, which will end up costing billions and then Jack up electricity rates to record highs in a few years, the Minister of energy said, quote -- our plan has been approved by her peers, speaking of the auditor general, at some of Canada's top cat accounting firms like KPMG, Ernst & young and deloitte. The auditor general has said, as of March 19, that Q deloitte L.L.P. And Ernst & young L.L.P. Have confirmed to us that they provided no formal opinions, no formal opinions approving the accounting of the so-called fair hydro plan that the government planned to use for its consolidated financial statements, end quote. So, Mr. Speaker, who's telling the truth here?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've said all along, we know, Mr. Speaker, that families in this province asked for real and immediate relief on their electricity bills and that's what we delivered, Mr. Speaker. We made a policy choice -- Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We made a policy choice to ensure that we continue to have a clean, reliable and affordable electricity system for the ratepayers of today and that ratepayers of tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. The fair hydro plan 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 with the electricity system. So officials from the treasury board, finance, O.P.G., the ieso and the Ontario financing authority, along with external advisors. That included Ernst & young KPMG and deloitte. Worked on accounting related to the fair hydro

plan. They along with the office of the provincial Oller, Mr. Speaker, ensured that this plan was in accordance with the public sector, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Smith: Mr. Speaker, I know there's a lot of ice across Ontario this morning, but the Minister sure skated around that question. Mr. Speaker, the auditor said KPMG told it that it has not provided an opinion on the accounting of fair hydro plan in the government's consolidated financial statements. On March 26, the Minister said this. KPMG and deloitte worked on the accounting related to the fair hydro plan. They along with the office of the provincial controller ensured that this plan was in accordance with public sector accounting. That was the quote from the Minister of energy. Mr. Speaker, my question is, is he telling the truth?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The truth is 25% of this population have seen a reduction of 25%, Mr. Speaker, on their hydro bills. The truth is that they voted against it, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to telling the truth, it's this government that makes sure that we're transparent and we make sure that we bring forward everything on behalf of the people. On that side of the House, Mr. Speaker, they vote against everything that we put forward to build Ontario up, Mr. Speaker. Minimum wage. We make sure that we bring that forward, Mr. Speaker, to help the province of Ontario. They vote against it, Mr. Speaker. 25% reduction through the fair hydro plan. They vote against it, Mr. Speaker. 50% reduction on average for those families that are in Hydro One areas, Mr. Speaker, and six other jurisdictions. They voted against that as well, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to looking after the people of Ontario, we will take no lesson from that party, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Smith: Mr. Speaker, the auditor general, independent officer of the legislature, has said all of the accounting firms confirm they didn't formally approve the Liberal accounting. But the Minister says that they did. Deloitte, Ernst & young and KPMG offered no formal opinion supporting the fair hydro plan, and remember this Liberal unfair hydro plan spends millions and billions of dollars over the next 30 years in interest payments to get them through the next election period before rates soar to record highs, highs that we've never seen in Ontario. Speaker, what the Minister has said in the House is a direct contradiction to many of the Minister 's statements. Why is he lying to the House ?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to the fair hydro plan, it's this government that brought forward the plan to make sure that we reduce rates right across the province, Mr. Speaker, for all ratepayers, Mr. Speaker. On that side of the House, they voted against it. But the interesting thing, Mr. Speaker, is the people's guarantee, which they once all signed and once all agreed with actually kept the fair hydro plan in it, Mr. Speaker. So talking about hypocrisy, Mr. Speaker, that is something -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to work to keep our system clean, relied affordable in this province, Mr. Speaker. We will make sure that we work together with the ministry of environment and climate change. To make sure we're meeting our climate change action plan goals, Mr. Speaker, and keep our system clean and affordable.

MPP Gelinias to Minister Naqvi Re: Hospital Overcrowding

>> MPP France Gelinias: [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. [End of Translation] When the Premier reads the newspaper, new Democrats listen to people who are telling her there is a crisis in our hospitals, who does she think is responsible for that crisis?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, the Premier and her government is very much committed to investing in our public health care system. This is something that we've been doing, doing so from the beginning, making sure that we bring our wait times down in our hospitals to make sure that there is new capital investments to be made all across the provide so that they're better facilities available in all communities across the province. I did see in my hometown of Ottawa, Speaker, I see that every single hospital in Ottawa has grown exponentially. We've got a state-of-the-art regional campus care centre at the Ottawa hospital on the general campus. We just built a new cardiac care unit at the Ottawa heart institute. We just announced, Speaker, \$1.8 billion to build a new civic

hospital in my community of Ottawa centre. These are all important investments to ensure that we provide quality care to Ontarians across this province.

>> MPP Gelinis: Thank you, Speaker. Global standards says that safe level of occupancy for a hospital is 85%. But all across our province, hospitals are running at over 100% capacity. Why? Does the Minister think that hospitals are running at unsafe level of capacity and are overcrowded? Why, Speaker ?

>> Minister Naqvi: Just in this year's budget, which I hope the NDP Will support, Speaker, we are investing more than an additional \$5 billion over the next three years to provide more and better access to health care services. Our investments, Speaker, will also help reduce the time and stress associated with caring for our loved ones. This includes, Speaker, \$2.1 billion in new funding for better and faster access to mental health and addiction services for hundreds of thousands more children, young people and adults. Speaker, that is the single largest investment in mental health care services ever in the history of our province, which is part of budget 2018. We're also expanding OHIP Plus to make prescriptions completely free for everyone up to the age of 25 and over 65. Once again, Speaker, we're the first province in the country. Provide universal pharmacare, something we hope the NDP Will support. Not to mention we're introducing the new Ontario drug and dental program. And reducing -- through additional investment.

>> MPP Gelinis: The Premier and the Liberals created this crisis in our hospitals. And now what people want to know what's next? We know that with Doug Ford he will cut and privatize. For health care, that means more hallway medicine. But today my leader, Andrea Horwath announcing a plan to fix the crisis in our hospitals. There's going to be hope, Speaker. We won't just stop the damage. We will fix it. We know that the Premier says she cares, but is she sorry she let things go so bad?

>> Minister Naqvi: Speaker, one thing NDP and we agree is that Doug Ford will cut health care services. It's very clear from their \$10 billion cuts that they have part of their platform that they're going to be firing teachers and nurses and personal support workers all across our province and that's something that we will not stand for. But, Speaker, we have continued to make investments in our health care system all across the province and NDP should come forward and support this very important budget that is investing over \$5 billion over the next three years to provide better access to health care services across the province, including services for mental health care and addiction services. Speaker, just talking about reducing wait times, we are investing an additional \$822 million in our Ontario hospitals. It's the largest single government investment in hospitals in almost a decade, not to mention, Speaker, as I mentioned earlier. Investing billions of dollars in new hospitals, expanding hospitals so that Ontarians have state-of-the-art care available right in their community.

MPP McNaughton to Minister Sousa (Ballard) Re: Gas Prices

>> MPP Monte McNaughton: Thanks very much, Speaker. My question this morning is to the Minister of finance. Experts are guessing the price of gas will jump to more than \$1.40 per litre in Ontario this summer. This government has already said that their cap and trade carbon tax has pushed prices up by at least 4.3 cents per litre. Speaker, it's just another example of how every day the Liberals are making it more expensive to live and work in this province. There are millions of people in Ontario who can't get to work or run an errand without gas in their tank. Why is this Liberal government kicking these people when they're down?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question because the member opposite makes reference to commodity price that is traded -- and recognizing prices have been going up and the commodity price all around the world. Mr. Speaker, he also references cap and trade, a market that has been created with the initiative with Québec, California and we have Jerry Brown here this week Mr. Speaker -- The governor here in town talking about the merits. The state of California has been increasing their G.D.P. And have been growing as has Ontario, Mr. Speaker.

Furthermore, there is an alternative. And the alternative that the opposition's proposing is a carbon tax ultimately which is going to cost taxpayers and the residents of our province. More money taken out of their pockets in this budget. We provided measures for affordability. Supporting us, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP McNaughton: Speaker, back to the Minister. When the price of gas jumps, it raises the price of almost everything people buy. The terrible energy decisions made by this government have already forced too many families to face the choice to heat or eat. Now new fears are arising about being able to afford fuel to get to work, groceries to put on the table and other basic necessities. The price of the Liberal cap and trade carbon tax is only making the situation worse. What does this Liberal government have to say to the thousands of people worried that their government policies will once again force them to make heartbreaking decisions for their families?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you for that question. You know, Speaker, it appears that the member opposite and the members of the P.C. Party care about the regular folks of Ontario, but in fact their opposition to fighting climate change, their opposition to our cap and trade clearly demonstrates they really don't care about folks here in Ontario. I can tell you, Speaker, their attack on climate change, their attack on our cap and trade process is an attack on the health of Ontarians. It is an attack -- Thank you, Speaker. Let me continue that the P.C. Attack on climate change, the P.C. Attack on our -- Cap-and-trade program is an attack on Ontario business, an attack on Ontario residents, and we won't stand for it.

MPP Gates to Minister Sousa Re: Auto Insurance Rates

>> MPP Wayne Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question to the acting Premier. Acting Premier, in 2013 you promised the people of this province you'd see a 15% reduction in their auto insurance rates. Here we are in 2018, and not only have we not seen that reduction but last Friday, we found out our insurance rates were actually going to go up yet again. Thank you. That money that comes out of people's ability to pay for their food, pay for rising costs of gasoline and pay for these out-of-control hydro rates. Premier, you admitted to this House that lowering auto insurance rates by 15% was a stretch goal. Will you now admit it was never a goal at all, and that you're unwilling to act as these rates continue to climb yet again.

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite does make reference to the fact that rates have -- auto insurance rates have been challenging, and we have taken many steps to try to maintain and reduce. When you rate it for inflation, rates have actually gone down on average 11%. More importantly, Mr. Speaker, all across Canada rates have been going up while in Ontario they have not. But we must -- what we must do however is continue to be diligent and that's why we've taken measures with the fraud office, measures to provide for additional programming to reduce those costs of claims thereby reducing premiums over time. More importantly there is some fraud that needs to be eliminated, Mr. Speaker. We're taking those steps. We're working hard to do so.

>> MPP Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Anything you've done to correct auto insurance has hurt victims. Back to the acting Premier. Last year court found Ontario had the most expensive auto insurance premium in Canada. And yet, compared to other provinces, Ontario's one of the lowest levels of collisions. We ask you again postal code discrimination and you won't do it. We ask you to lower auto insurance rates by 15% and you won't do it. When is enough going to be enough? And when are you going to seriously look at actually lowering people's auto insurance rates instead of watching them skyrocket? Thank you.

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, as noted we did take steps, numerous steps and that is why Ontario's rates have not been going up. More importantly our Ontario fair auto insurance plan we have created independent medical examination centres. We've provided it -- improvement for victims by creating a standard treatment plan for those minor injuries. We've established a serious fraud office which has currently cost the system up to \$1.6 billion in bogus claims. We're working

with the law society for contingency on fee reforms. We've given fiscal -- to conduct a postal code review so we can be certain we're not penalizing rural and northern communities that don't have this incident. We have to be mindful of that as well. Advice a regulatory has been providing for consumer protection mechanisms. More importantly created that expert panel to provide proper guidance throughout this process.

MPP Rinaldi to Minister Flynn Re: Minimum Wage Increase

>> MPP Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of labour. Over the past number of years, I've spoken with countless families about the nature of their work, how the nature of their work has changed. These families are working hard to put food on their table and take care of their children but they were finding that the money runs out before the month is over. While this opposition may not be shared by those across the aisle, I firmly believe that everyone who works 35 or 40 hours a week shouldn't have to struggle to get by. That is why I'm so pleased that our government has made substantial changes to our workplace laws. This include of course increase to a \$14 an hour minimum wage. Minister, can you please inform this House about how these changes came about and what employees can expect as a result?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member for that question. The conversations that the member outlines that he's had in his community echo what we've all heard across this province over the past three years, Speaker. When we embark on that very extensive and comprehensive review of our employment laws, we knew that things had changed in the province of Ontario since we looked at them last. What we heard loud and clear from the people Ontario was it was time to make some changes. That's why we moved forward with our plan to create the fair workplaces and better jobs act. We made the following changes, Speaker: Increase minimum wage. Two paid personal emergency leave days. Increased vacation, Speaker. Equal pay for work of equal value. Domestic and sexual violence leaves, Speaker. Speaker, we didn't have support from everybody in the House. Which is disappointing but not surprising, but I'm very proud of the work we've done to increase the lot of ordinary people in the province of Ontario.

>> MPP Rinaldi: Thank you, Minister. We know our economy's doing well. It has led the G-7 economy in growth for over three years now. Since the recession we have created over 820,000 new jobs and our employment rate is the lowest point since 2001. Our business expanding creating wealth and I believe that everyone deserves to share in that prosperity. And yet these are those who -- and yet there are those who believe it is still not time for these changes. They believe it's too soon. They believe \$15 an hour is too much. They believe the working people of this province should wait although they won't say for how long. I know the families in northumberland and quinte west simply cannot wait. Those who are earning minimum wage deserve a wage that helps them make ends meet and safe to go ahead. Minister, in your plan, can Ontario expect \$15 minimum wage? Is that subject to change?

>> Minister Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you again for the supplementary, Speaker. It's very, very simple. We're going to be increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour as of January 1st, 2019, Speaker. Speaker, we know these -- we know the party across the aisle plans to cancel the increase to \$15, to make money away from minimum wage earners. That's money they rely on for food, Speaker, for rent, for transit, for living expenses. We on this side of the House don't think that's fair, Speaker. We don't think it's right. We don't think Ontarians should have to wait any longer. We've phased the minimum wage in over 18 months. It's going to be tied back to inflation after the January 2019 increase. What it means is it ensures that more workers are benefiting from Ontario's economic growth, Speaker. You add that to free tuition, to rent control, to OHIP plus. It's just another step towards increasing -- Creating more opportunities, Speaker. Speaker, we're standing up for workers. We have their back. The P.C.S should come along with us.

MPP Cho to Minister Sousa Re: Auto Insurance Rates

>> MPP Raymond Cho: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question is for the acting Premier. The headline in this morning's "Toronto sun" reads, quotation, biggest fraud in auto insurance is Liberal promise for lower rate. Acting Premier, under the Liberal government's watch, the auto insurance rates have increased 29%, more higher than the inflation rate. Yet Ontarians already paid 55% higher than the Canadian average, and remain the highest car insurance rates in Canada. While having one of the lowest claims. Deed your previous promise, why the people of Ontario paying the highest insurance rates in Canada under your leadership?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, let me correct the record there. The member opposite makes reference to the inflation-adjusted term of auto insurance rates. He's absolutely wrong. If he takes that effect, if he takes that measure, rates have gone down on average by 11%.

>> MPP Cho: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to the acting Premier again. Provincial election is just around the corner. What kind of election promise you are going to make to fl the people of Ontario this time?

>> Minister Sousa: Let me see if I get this right. The member opposite has referenced the fact that auto insurance rates have gone up. They actually have gone down. Then he says what actions should we take -- Then he makes reference to the steps that are being taken but then he says they're not which in fact they are like the fraud office, like the work we're doing with programs to reduce the overall cost of the auto insurance, which is in fact too high in Ontario. We acknowledge that. That's why we've taken steps that we have to eliminate them, to eliminate some of the fraud. Mr. Speaker, they vote against those very measures that are helping Ontarians so we will continue to do what's necessary to establish that fraud office. And ensure that the minor claims are immediately attended to and ensure that we get rid of the fat that's in the system that's taken abuse. We need to reduce that. Support us on that issue.

MPP Sattler to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: Hospital Overcrowding

>> MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Speaker, I'd like to refer the acting Premier to a document from London health sciences centre called "The allway transfer protocol" that was approved on January 31st. The protocol sets out the rules for the transfer of patients from the emergency department to the Hal, from critical care to the hallway, and from the post-anaesthetic care unit to the hallway. The rules include stairwells are not to be used. Stretchers are to be lined up on just one side of the hallway. Patients should be regularly assessed for sleep deprivation in order to prevent incidents of violence. Speaker, will the acting Premier accept responsibility for his government's chronic underfunding of our health care system that has allowed hallway medicine. To become normalized at London health sciences centre?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member opposite for that very important question. Speaker, we recognize that our growing and aging population is facing increasing pressures and that we need to ensure that we are building a solid health care system. And, Speaker, I want to talk about some of the things that we are doing. In fact in our budget, we are making deliberate choices to invest in care for the people of Ontario by investing not just in one place and in one sector but across the board. We're investing in hospitals. We invest in home care. We're investing in mental health and we're investing in long-term care. Why? Because we recognize that we are investing in the people of Ontario, because it means a better quality of life. But you know what, Speaker? I want to talk a little bit about what happened under the NDP's watch. Let's just talk a little bit about their track record. After all the NDP's plan will cut 9645 hospital beds. Like they did in the past. Is that what's going to happen with your new plan?

>> MPP Sattler: Again to the acting Premier. Speaker, last Thursday, the London district academy of

medicine held a patient health care forum for Londoners to share their experiences with our health care system. In 2014, David Cameron Teixeira waited four days in a London health sciences centre hallway. Earlier this month, Dawn Warren waited five days in a London health sciences centre hallway. Speaker, hallway medicine has been a reality in London for years, and this Liberal government has done nothing to fix it. Does the acting Premier think that a hallway transfer protocol at LHSC is an acceptable solution to the years of budget cuts that have led to people lining the hallways of London health sciences centre on a regular ongoing basis?

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Speaker. Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the investments that we're making. So absolutely we are doing everything we can to ensure that we're building a solid health care system. \$822 million in operating funds. That's a 4.6% overall increase to increase capacity, decrease wait times and improve access to care for families. This funding is definitely going to benefit the people of Ontario, whether it translates into 26,000 additional M.R.I. Operating hours, 14,000 more surgical medical procedures, 3,000 more cardiac procedures. In addition to all of this 19 billion in capital grants to ensure our world-class hospitals will be there to support our province in the future, including 2.4 billion as I mentioned for sickkids 1.9 billion over three years. To make life more affordable for millions of Ontarians through prescription drugs, ohp plus and Ontario drug and dental program.

MPP Dong to Minister Milczyn Re: Poverty Reduction Strategy

>> MPP Han Dong: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister responsible for poverty reduction strategy. Speaker, on this side of the House, we recognize that empowering individuals and families to reach their full potential is the right thing to do. We know that a fair Ontario is one that builds every one of us up, no matter who you are or where you were born. That's why our government chooses care and progress instead of cuts. We also know that there's more work to be done in this area. Speaker, last week the Minister released the poverty reduction strategy annual report for 2017. This annual report details province progress on the target that the reduction of child poverty and reduction of effects of poverty on Ontario. Could the Minister highlight the progress shown on this year's annual report?

>> Minister Peter Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want to thank the member for Trinity-Spadina for the question. Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud to say that Ontarians are really seeing the results of our poverty reduction initiative. The number of children living in poverty has decreased by 19,000. That's a decrease of 24.2% from 2012. We've made investments in full-day kindergarten for 260,000 4- and 5-year-olds. The Ontario child benefit is being delivered directly to individuals and families with low and moderate incomes. The ohp plus pharmacare program is providing free prescriptions to Ontarians 24 and under. And we're raising the minimum wage to \$15 to ensure working Ontarians can make ends meet. We know our economy is strong. Not everyone is benefitting from that, but we're doing everything we can to lift Ontarians out of poverty, provide them with more opportunities. More care and more fairness, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Dong: Thank you. I would like to thank the Minister for the answer. I'm happy to say that my constituents are reaping the benefits of this government's investments in them. Through the local poverty reduction fund, the province has funded the scadding court community centre in my riding of Trinity-Spadina. It offers programming, targeted to underserved and culturally diverse groups, bringing 500 to 600 visitors daily. We also know that there is more to be done. It has become clear to my constituents and all of those living in Ontario that coming June 7th, a stark choice is to be made. Speaker, how will my constituents know what stands to be lost given the \$9.6 billion fiscal hole resulting from the P.C.'s decision to walk away from the cap-and-trade program?

>> Minister Milczyn: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've spent four years on Toronto council with Doug Ford. And while his brother had the common touch, Doug Ford is out of touch. Whether it's 9.6 billion fiscal hole, does he understand what that means? Ferris wheels and shopping malls on city council. He has no idea about the services that Torontonians depended on from government. He has no idea what

Ontarians depend on. Just 1 billion of the cuts that he would put in place would roll back all of our housing initiatives in this province. It means cutting our programs to help those who are homeless. It means taking away the basic income pilot. It means cutting real dollars away from our social housing retrofit. The person who claims that he cares about the little people and the ones in social housing. He's going to cut money that's going to their homes. Doug Ford is out of touch, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro One CEO Salary

>> MPP Todd Smith: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Speaker, does the Premier believe that a \$6 million salary is acceptable for the C.E.O. Of Hydro One?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again we talked about this last week, but first I'd like to start off with the weather that we've had over the last couple of days. I want to thank all of the Hydro One workers. The utility -- Get us back and connected so we can have power right across the province. As well, Mr. Speaker, moving forward, we recognize that salaries, Mr. Speaker, are hard to imagine for many families right across the province, Mr. Speaker. But we make sure that the board will continue to monitor this and, Mr. Speaker, they need to ensure that, you know, they are bringing forward savings for the ratepayers. Last the executive. At Hydro One were able to find \$114 million in savings that led to lower bills for customers, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Smith: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. It's actually shocking to see the Liberals defend the six million dollar man and the salary of the C.E.O. At Hydro One. When people across the province are struggling to pay their electricity bills. They're having to choose between heating and eating. Under the Liberals, we've seen the cost of electricity rise by 300%, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Does she believe that a 6 million-dollar salary is acceptable for the C.E.O. At Hydro One?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, do people of Ontario find it acceptable that that party votes against giving them a 25% savings, Mr. Speaker? Do the people of Ontario find it acceptable that that party votes against anything to do with climate change, Mr. Speaker? On this side of the House, we make sure that we continue to act in the best interests of the people of Ontario. The Conservatives, Mr. Speaker, will do nothing, nothing to lower electricity bills for Ontario families. By talking about firing the C.E.O. Of Hydro One, that doesn't take anything off of anybody's bills, Mr. Speaker. Let's see what the well respected business journalists that are talking about Mr. Ford's reckless N, Mr. Speaker. He said the Ontario Progressive Conservatives have been obsessed with the broadening of ownership spreading misinformation about this company, Mr. Speaker. He also pointed out that the opposition parties -- My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I do withdraw. Thank you. He also pointed out the opposition party seemed to forget or leave out every single time Hydro One doesn't set the rates, Mr. Speaker. It must get approval for any rate changes from the Ontario energy board, and which factors and issues such as employee compensation when making its decisions. Thank you very much.

MPP Forster to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro One Compensation

>> MPP Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. My love's to the Premier. For almost two years my constituent norman and his 92-year-old wife, low-income seniors, have been fighting with Hydro One to get full compensation after hydro crews accidentally blew up their appliances at their rent geared-to-income residence in Thornhill. That's right, Speaker. 220 volts went through their building at 61 Ormond street in Thornhill, instead of the intended 110 volts, destroying the appliances and Hydro One is refusing to pay the full compensation of \$1,100 to them. Speaker, Ontario Democrats have been warning about the privatization of hydro, and here we are cutting corners and seniors are left in our community to bear the brunt. Why is the Liberal government allowing vulnerable low-income seniors in our communities to pay the expensive price for this government's shortsighted --

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for the question, and I can say that there are other customers from this complex that are coming forward as well, Mr. Speaker, and submitting claims, and Hydro One will be reviewing every single one of those claims and assessing them on their individual merits, Mr. Speaker. I understand that Hydro One is working hard to resolve this matter, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Forster: Speaker, it's been two years these seniors, low-income seniors have been waiting for the restitution. This error was made at the hands of Hydro One at a residence in my riding that House's low-income tenants, most of them seniors. They now have been forced to pay \$1,100 to replace their own appliances. Meanwhile under the Liberal government's watch Hydro One executives received \$11 million in compensation last year. Again I ask the Premier why does the Liberal government continue to allow vulnerable seniors, in my riding, to bear the brunt for shortsighted and ill-informed decisions?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again as I said earlier, I understand that Hydro One is actively looking into this customer's concerns as we speak, Mr. Speaker. They're also working with the complex where there are other claims being submitted, Mr. Speaker. You know, that said since the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One, it has become a better run company. Under new management Hydro One is improving on a number of service metrics, Mr. Speaker. First one Hydro One has indicated it has improved the quality of their call centre interactions, through improved training for staff information managements additionally since the broadening of ownership management has found \$114 million in savings, which helps keep ratepayers' bills low, Mr. Speaker. And I know the biggest idea that the NDP has when it comes to energy is to buyback shares of Hydro One will again do nothing. To reduce bills, Mr. Speaker. Hydro rates continue to be regulated by the Ontario energy board, who have the mandate to protect ratepayers, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Martins to Minister Naqvi Re: Legal Aid Investments

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question this morning is to the Attorney General. Access justice is a key issue that many people across Ontario face daily and I know that our government has made record investments into improving access to justice, but there is always more that can be done. Specifically for our most vulnerable. These people are often low income and often marginalized and racialized. They need more -- they need our supports the most because, as we know the justice system can often be a lengthy and costly process. I can guarantee that all of the members in this House have heard stories about their constituents, in going through their cases or trials, cannot afford a lawyer. They then turn to legal aid. In my own riding of Davenport, the west Toronto legal clinic and legal aid Ontario overall, has been instrumental in supporting those who most need the support but they need more help. Can the Attorney General please detail how our government intends to bolster legal aid?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Davenport for the question. Speaker, we know how important access to justice in Ontario is. That is why Ontario's providing more people with affordable access to legal services by increasing the financial eligibility threshold for legal aid by another 6%. As of April the 1st, Speaker, this year, about 140,000 more people are now eligible to receive the legal services they need, regardless of their ability to pay. This is because of our province's investment to legal aid Ontario also known as L.A.O., to increase access to legal aid services for lower income and vulnerable people provincewide. This is part of, Speaker, Ontario's 2014 commitment to expand access to legal aid services provided by L.A.O. To an additional 1 million Ontarians. Ten years. With more than 500,000 additional people who will be eligible for legal aid, Ontario is now more than halfway to this very important goal.

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I would like to thank the Attorney General for his answer. That is excellent and I'm sure that this funding will be a lot of help in not only my riding of Davenport but across the province in every member's riding. Despite this major investment I have

heard that there are certain communities or groups who have unique needs and whose services need to be tailored towards them. For instance in my riding of Davenport, in fact across Toronto, there is a large LGBTQ2 community, many of whom have very specific needs. This community has a significantly higher rate of sexual and domestic or intimate partner violence and very low rates of reporting. As many of us have heard, they also have a strained relationship with the justice system. Can the Attorney General please explain how we are going to invest in supporting the LGBTQ2 community?

>> Minister Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. The member from Davenport asks a very important question, Speaker as I have stated supporting the most vulnerable is a major priority for our government. In our recently announced gender-based violence strategy, we announced a \$242 million investment that commits the province to committing further supports for survivors and those who are at risk of gender-based violence. We also announced a new pilot, Speaker. Our government is piloting Canada's first ever LGBTQ2 community legal clinic right here in Toronto. Speaker, this clinic will be made to meet the need for specialized legal support within this community and work to address the high rate of sexual assault, and hopefully encourage people to step forward and improve reporting of abuse. Speaker, because of our government's understanding, these sort of investments are crucial to building an inclusive and supportive -- Thank you.

MPP Clark to Premier Wynne Re: 2018 Budget

>> MPP Steve Clark: My question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, in the last two weeks, how much money has the Liberals spent campaigning on the taxpayers' dime?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I understand why the member opposite would not want us to talk about the budget plan that we brought in, Mr. Speaker. I understand that they don't want to talk about child care, Mr. Speaker. They don't want to talk about investment in home care or long-term care, Mr. Speaker. They don't want to acknowledge that right now people in this province, even though our economy is growing, even though our unemployment rate is the lowest it's been in 20 years, but not everybody's feeling the benefit of that, Mr. Speaker, and so we need to step up as a government and provide the care and the tools that people need to be able to care for themselves and care for their families. I understand why this party would not want to talk about that, Mr. Speaker, because they have no idea and no plans for how they would meet those needs, how they would help people to care for themselves, Mr. Speaker, and so I get why they don't want us talking about our budget as we do every year, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Clark: Back to the Premier. The Liberals have held fewer than 25 campaign-style events over the last two weeks. This comes at an incredible expense to the taxpayer. Speaker, will the Liberal party pay back the taxpayer for their campaign style event?

>> Premier Wynne: Speaker, let's talk about what we have been saying as we have been talking with people of Ontario since we brought the budget in, Mr. Speaker. As we do every year, we talk about what is in our budget so people will know what it is we're debating in the legislature, Mr. Speaker, and what they can expect as we implement the budget to pass in the legislature, Mr. Speaker. So we're talking about investing more in seniors' care, Mr. Speaker. In fact giving caregivers some support when they're looking after an older loved relative, Mr. Speaker, giving them some money to actually be able to keep up the house, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about providing child care, free preschool child care, Mr. Speaker, for 2-and-a-half to 4-year-olds. One of the interesting things. The leader of the opposition talked about was that was a ridiculous policy because it was unborn children. Government exists to put in place conditions for all children --

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

>> MPP Jennifer French: Thaou, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. We just updated Ontario's employment standards, and then you and your government secretly threw in an exemption to limit the personal emergency leave and bereavement days of auto workers. You specifically set your sights on auto workers. This isn't right and it isn't fair. The Minister has said that this exemption will help to keep Ontario competitive in the global market. Speaker, Ontario should not be competing in a race to the bottom. We should be setting the standard when it comes to workers' rights. Why does this P think it is ok to give auto workers fewer leave days than everybody else?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member for that question. Speaker, on January the 1st of 2017, after we had a consultation with the industry, with stakeholders and with others involved in the auto industry, Speaker, we put in place a personal emergency leave pilot project in the auto sector. What it required is that auto sectors employers with more than 50 employees provide each employee use of up to seven personal emergency leave days as well as up to three days for the unfortunate death of a family member, should that occur, Speaker. Speaker, it was a very specific recommendation of the special advisors of the changing workplaces review. Now as a result of that, Speaker, of the actions we took on bill 148, as of January the 1st of 2018, the 50 employee threshold was removed and for the first time ever, Speaker, all employers in the auto sector. Are required to make personal emergency leave available to each employee, Speaker .

>> MPP French: Thank you, Speaker, and again to the Premier. You've put a specific target on auto workers. However in my community of Oshawa, cleaners in the G.M. Plants are finding they are being redesignated to autoworker so their leave days can be limited, too. When this House is reviewing Ontario's employment standards, both the Liberals and the Conservatives voted against the NDP Amendment that would have ensured that everybody had access to the same leave days guaranteed in the new employment standards act. Now we can see why you voted against the fix. This government now can unfairly target any workers in the whole auto industry. I know the Minister has been meeting with union on this issue and I know auto workers in our communities want to know will you commit today to amending the employment standards act to ensure that all workers get the same access to leave days?

>> Minister Flynn: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the member for that supplementary, Speaker. Speaker, with the auto strategy we have in the province of Ontario, we're committed to the success of this province's auto sector. It's a very highly competitive global economy. And we're going to make sure that that success, Speaker, is shared with the employees of work in the sector. As the labour reforms work out, Speaker, we continue to engage with stakeholders. This is a pilot project, Speaker as was put in place. In some ways it improved, Speaker. In some way it has had a neutralizing effect on personal emergency leaves. Last week, Speaker, I was able to sit down with union, with a number of people that work in the domestic markets, Speaker, Toyota, at Honda, Speaker. We're working towards a resolution of this issue, Speaker. We said we would do an evaluation of the pilot project. We're keeping our word. That's exactly what we're doing, Speaker .

MPP Potts to Minister Zimmer Re: Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation in Ontario

>> MPP Arthur Potts: My question's to the Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation. Reconciliation with indigenous peoples is a top priority for our government, and it's important to recognize that reconciliation is not just an event or an apology. It's a journey that we have committed to taking together with our indigenous partners. Speaker, in Beaches- East York I am so proud to go to my local schools and during the morning announcements hear the acknowledgement we owe to indigenous people because I know the next generation is growing up better understanding their responsibilities to work together. So, Speaker, intended that last week the Minister was joined by indigenous partners and former Ministers to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the creation of his ministry. Speaker, will the Minister please tell us more about this event and the work that the Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation has been doing in his tenure and what the ministry over the last ten years is doing together with our indigenous partners?

>> Minister David Zimmer: Speaker, the story of the ministry of indigenous relations and reconciliation begins with the tragic Ipperwash provincial park actions. But for eight years following that, the then Harris government ignored calls for indigenous peoples for an inquiry into the Ipperwash crisis. But within a month of taking office in 2003, then Attorney General Michael Bryant commissioned an inquiry. The inquiry report recommended, among other things, that the ministry of indigenous relations be established. Last week I was joined by indigenous partners and former Ministers and civil servants and other stakeholders to celebrate the tenth anniversary of this ministry. The ministry closes gaps and removes barriers. It supports cultural revitalization. It's a meaningful source of resolutions to the historic grievances of indigenous peoples.

>> MPP Potts: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the Minister for not just his answer, Speaker, but for the stalwart work he puts into his ministry in building bridges for indigenous partners. In the story of the ministry's creation, I hear of a government that listens that, cares and that takes action, realizing a positive social change can take a long time, and we've seen a great deal of good come from the work this ministry has done across government over the past ten years. In fact in just the past four years I've seen our government officially apologize for Ontario's role in the residential school system and make a historic \$250 million commitment to reconciliation through the journey together. We've also committed 108 million to take action to end violence against indigenous women, and we passed the tree recognition week act making Ontario the first province to officially celebrate this week in November. Finally, Speaker, we've made indigenous history and culture a mandatory part of Ontario's curriculum and Ontario's culture. Can the Minister tell us more. About these incredible steps we are taking together with our indigenous partners moving towards reconciliation?

>> Minister Zimmer: Speaker, last week we heard from indigenous partners who joined us for this celebration just how significant the work of the ministry was. As we mark the first decade of this new ministry devoted to indigenous issues, it is important to look back and take stock and rededicate ourselves. But, Speaker, I am worried. I am worried that this ministry is at risk if the Conservative government is elected next fall. Speaker, we've seen time and time again that indigenous issues are at the bottom of the Progressive Conservatives' agenda. They voted against our \$250 million commitment to reconciliation twice. Not to mention our \$1 billion commitment to the ring of fire infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, recollection is action more than words. Action is commitment. This government has shown that the official opposition has not and will not.

MPP Yurek to Premier Wynne Re: Surgery Wait-Times

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Premier. Surgery wait times in Ontario have reached catastrophic levels. Last week Ottawa resident Bruce Mackenzie witnessed firsthand your government's health care failures when her surgery was cancelled moments before going under the knife. Question for the Premier, does she think it's acceptable to cancel surgeries moments before a scheduled surgery to take place?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I don't know the specifics of this situation and I am sure that the member opposite will share it with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. But, Mr. Speaker, again, I hope that this concern that the member opposite is expressing will encourage him to vote for the get, Mr. Speaker, in which we have included a significant investment, \$822 million, Mr. Speaker, to hospitals including, Mr. Speaker, more funding for home care, more funding for mental health care, Mr. Speaker. I hope that this member sees that it is imperative that we continue to invest in our health care system. Every year, Mr. Speaker, we have included an increased funding to our hospitals, to home care, to health care across the province, Mr. Speaker. We recognize, we recognize that there's more that we need to do so I hope the member opposite. Will be supporting us as we bring forward our budget, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. Speaker, it's interesting the Premier answers that question as such considering it was her government who froze hospital funding for five years.

Her government that attacked our doctors. Reducing funds reaching our patients in the front line. Mr. Speaker, this government has been a failure in managing health care and is only promising the world as a minute game in order to gain votes. Mr. Speaker, this is the second time the surgery for Mrs. Mackenzie has been cancelled because of this government's failures. Last month it was cancelled because of overcrowding in the hospital because the government failed in supporting the hospitals during the flu season. Two cancelled surges in one month but it's becoming the norm in this province. Last month, a London patient had to have their bypass surgery cancelled at the last moment for the fourth time. It's unacceptable the level of care this government is providing to people of Ontario. Will the Minister call the Ottawa hospital and ask that surgery be rescheduled asap?

>> Premier Wynne: Again, Mr. Speaker, I don't know the specifics of the individual case that the member opposite is raising but I know that he will share that information with the Minister of health and long-term care. But it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite said about the budgets from year to year, Mr. Speaker. We have increased funding every year to hospitals and across the health care system, Mr. Speaker. And it's interesting that an organization like the Fraser institute, Mr. Speaker, which I think the member opposite can agree is not exactly an organization that is friendly to our government. But the Fraser institute has joined with CIHI, Mr. Speaker. The wait times alliance. They have all agreed that Ontario is at the very top, the best for wait times in this country, Mr. Speaker. So that is the reality. That's the truth of the situation that we are leading the country in terms of wait times, Mr. Speaker. But even with that, we recognize that there is more that we can do. Again I call on the member opposite to support the budget because insuring that budget is a significant increase in funding specifically to hospitals as well as to mental health and to home care, Mr. Speaker.