

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript - Monday, March 20, 2017

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Date: Mon, 20 Mar 2017 12:03:16 -0400
Attachments: 20170320 - Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript.doc (119.3 kB)

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Monday, March 20, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro Advertising

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. This Liberal government has no business in possibly spending millions of hard earned taxpayer dollars on self-promoting hydro ads. They are blatantly partisan and they are literally radio stations and social media in a sad attempt to save this government's falling popularity. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier do the right thing and stop spending public dollars on these advertisements and order that they be cancelled today? Yes or no?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've been travelling the province. I've been talking to people for months, Mr. Speaker, including last week and people are very, very concerned about their hydro bills, Mr. Speaker. The leader of the opposition knows that. He knows, Mr. Speaker, as does the third party, they know that people are looking for relief, that the work that we have done up until now, Mr. Speaker, that there's more that we need to do. That's why the 25% reduction is very important. So, Mr. Speaker, we're moving ahead with our plan. I would have thought that, given the knows from the other side, Mr. Speaker, they understand that people are concerned about their electricity bills, that they would be supportive of the changes that we are bringing forward, Mr. Speaker, that -- Will give real relief to people across the province.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. As the Premier travels the province, no one is asking for more government vanity ads. The Liberal government has a bad track record, a long track record of misusing taxpayer-funded ads for partisan purposes. We all remember the \$8.1 million in self-congratulatory ads for the job-killing pension scheme that never came to fruition. \$8.1 million just to tax and sell -- Mr. Speaker, how many millions of dollars is this government going to waste on more self-congratulatory radio ads?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, you know the two issues that the leader of the opposition has raised, retirement security for people across the province and lower electricity rates, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely proud of our record on delivering both of those, Mr. Speaker. The reality is -- The reality is that the leader -- this leader of the opposition, Mr. Speaker, sat in a federal government for nine -- The federal government, Mr. Speaker, for nine years. They wouldn't even talk to the province about retirement security. We couldn't talk about Canada pension plan enhanced position, Speaker. We moved on that. We now have a national agreement on pension enhancement, Mr. Speaker. Because of the work that we did on the ortc, Mr. Speaker. In addition we're going to deliver lower electricity rates, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. It really is unbelievable. People can't afford their hydro bills. This government is spending millions on vanity ads self promoting their own agenda. I want to read a quote from the auditor general. The ads likely would not have been approved under the old government advertising rule. That's Bonnie Iysyk. Changes the Liberals enacted in 2015 reduce her office to a rubber stamp. I'll continue to quote from the auditor general - - It would likely not have passed because it does convey a positive impression of the current government and it's more a pat-on-the-back type of advertising. Those rules were put into place to prevent Liberal wasting taxpayer dollars on vanity ads. They changed the rules so they could use taxpayer dollars to promote themselves. The government can dance, point the finger, the government can avoid answering the questions. For years they complained about these type of ads when they were in opposition. Change the rules to not allow this to happen, and now they're doing the same thing. Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. Are you going to continue with these vanity ads?

>> Premier Wynne: This is a very important issue, and the reality is that, when this government came into office under my predecessor, there were virtually no rules around partisan advertising, Mr.

Speaker. And in fact I can remember sitting in this gallery and listening to the Liberal opposition -- I can remember sitting in this gallery, Mr. Speaker, when the Liberal opposition was asking the then Tory government about advertising that had the Premier's face in it, Mr. Speaker, that was all over. There were kids out of school because there were strikes, Mr. Speaker. There were hospitals being closed. The amalgamations were being imposed, Mr. Speaker. Chaos was raining and the Premier of the day had his face all over advertising. We changed those rules, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Hoskins) Re: Long-Term Care Home Funding

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker to the Premier since I can't get an answer on the government's vanity ads, I'm going to try a new approach. A recent big bold headline read, "Ontario nursing homes feed seniors at \$8.33 a day.", Mr. Speaker, does the Premier believe that is enough to nutritiously feed Ontario's vulnerable senior citizens?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is going to want to speak to this. We have been working very closely with the long term care association and with long-term care homes around the province, Mr. Speaker. There have been thousands more beds built, Mr. Speaker, and upgrades to beds across the province. We know that there's more work to be done, Mr. Speaker. We also know that, given the aging demographic, this is - - Mr. Speaker, 10,000 new long-term care beds have been built and another 13,500 have been redeveloped. Mr. Speaker, we know that there is more work to be done and we will work very closely with the long term care association as we move forward.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. \$8.33 wasn't even the most shocking stat in that article. Do you know what shocked me more? I'll tell you. It was the fact that Ontario spends over \$1 more a day on prisoners' food than it does on seniors' long-term care. More on prisoners -- I know when it comes to a choice of who we're going to support, is it seniors or is it prisoners? I would seniors. It is unbelievable that this government has made this allocation. Mr. Speaker, why do prisoners eat better than seniors in Premier Wynne's Ontario? And I would like the Premier to answer this please, Mr. Speaker.

>> Premier Wynne: Health and Long-Term Care.

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course the number the leader of the opposition is referring to is our provincially mandated minimum that is required by long-term care homes to spend on raw food. And raw food doesn't include the costs which we fund separately for. Food preparation. It doesn't include the cost for serving the food. The menus at the long-term care homes prepare have to be improved on -- approved on-site by a dietitian, Mr. Speaker. And in fact we provide tremendous flexibility within the budget we provide long-term care homes. \$142 per day per resident, flexibility to allow for additional expenditures in raw food.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. When it comes to government ads, there are millions of dollars to spend on self promotion. When it comes to seniors there's nothing. The Ontario association of nonprofit homes and services for seniors is only asking for 33 cents a day. Prisoners would still be getting more than seniors. How is this fair? The lack of respect that we're seeing for seniors is unbelievable. They deserve so much better. So no matter how the Minister of health spins it, how the Premier spins it, the reality is, under their rules, under their allocations, we're taking better care of prisoners than we are seniors. These are people's fathers and mothers. These are grandparents. These are our grandparents. Premier, is this how you want to treat our seniors? Mr. Speaker, will the Premier stand up and say. This is unacceptable?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year in our budget that they voted against, we increased the budget for raw food in the diet for raw food for residents of long-term care homes. We increased that by 3.7%, well above the cost of inflation of food inflation, Mr. Speaker. But we're listening to our stake holders, our partners in long-term care home and say -- as they bring forward

suggestions, proposals in advance of the budget, Mr. Speaker. Both in terms of the quantum that's required for raw food, and I should mention that we have a line item in the budget called "Other accommodation" which is \$54.52 per resident per day, all long-term care homes have the opportunity to draw on that \$54, in addition to that we put aside for raw food. Provide as they are mandated to, a nutritional diet for the residents, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my question's for the Premier. The Premier and her Liberal government ads touting their phantom hydro plan have been condemned by the auditor general as a pat on the back partisan exercise that would never have been allowed before the Liberals changed the rules on advertising, Speaker. Can the Premier tell Ontarians what the price tag is for these self-serving ads?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: I will just remind the leader of the third party that we were the province in this country that actually introduced rules around partisan advertising, Mr. Speaker. Before this government under my predecessor came to office, those rules didn't exist, Mr. Speaker. We put in place rules that said partisan advertising is inaccessible. In reaction, Mr. Speaker, to -- in reaction, Mr. Speaker, to the really egregious advertising that has been done by the Conservatives, Mr. Speaker, that were so blatantly partisan that it was obvious that there needed to be restrictions put in place. Those restrictions -- time. And we adhere to them.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I feel like it's comedy hour in the legislature. This government changed the rules and then changed them back so that they could use public money to advertise and promote themselves when they get into political trouble. Not one dime has come off of the skyrocketing hydro bills and this Premier has not tabled a plan yet or even any legislation yet to show Ontarians what their money is going to be spent on or if they are even going to save any money in the future. But she is still spending more money on advertising claiming the problem's been solved. How much is this attempt to buy the political relief on hydro bills going to cost Ontarians?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just remind the leader of the third party that we have a plan that actually will reduce people's electricity bills, Mr. Speaker, and will reduce those bills by the summer, Mr. Speaker, substantial relief. 25% on average off all bills across the province, Mr. Speaker, for residents who pay electricity in their homes, Mr. Speaker. Further relief for people who are paying disproportionately high distribution costs, Mr. Speaker, in remote and rural areas and an enhancement to the Ontario electricity support program that will help people on low income. Mr. Speaker, it's a substantial program that will deliver relief and will deliver it in a timely manner, Mr. Speaker. And I'm so pleased that the leader of the third party is eager to get going on that plan, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to her support as we move forward.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, instead of partisan ads, how about we actually receive a plan? We hear a lot of talk. We see a lot of press releases, but we have not yet seen a plan. These are obviously much more about the Premier and her Liberal party instead of making life more affordable for the people of Ontario. How much public money -- Is this Premier spending on advertising, Speaker, for -- How much public money is this Premier and her Liberal party spending on advertisements for the billion-dollar hydro borrowing scheme that she has still not made public?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased that we are talking about our plan, the plan that we've brought forward, that is actually going to reduce people's electricity bills --, Mr. Speaker, it is a substantial plan. And it actually will work, Mr. Speaker. So I was at a business this past week, Mr. Speaker, called -- I was in Barrie at a great chocolate and cheese shop, Mr. Speaker. They're going to see a substantial reduction in their electricity bill, which is going to allow them, Mr. Speaker, to expand their business. They are -- they're building a patio on the back of their store jai door and it is going to be a real anchor on the main street in Barrie, Mr. Speaker. J'adore. That's the kind of

business we want to see thrive and that's why it's so important that the real plan we are bringing forward is going to give them real relief.

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

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: My next question's also for the Premier, Speaker. The Premier has shown Ontarians where her priorities are. Self-serving, partisan radio ads for actual legislation or a tangible plan sometime later, I guess. Ontario families, businesses and public institutions like hospitals have the right to know what will happen to their hydro bill, Speaker, and who will pay the price for the \$40 billion going to line the pockets of bankers. When will the Premier finally table her proposed hydro plan so that people know how -- when, rather, and by how much the bills are going to end up going up?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Minister of energy.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and talk about when we're going to be bringing forward the legislation this spring to reduce everyone's bills by 25%, Mr. Speaker, in time so they can have this relief, Mr. Speaker, before summer. I know there will be time for proper debate and public hearings. And I know, Mr. Speaker, the opposition critics have received a technical briefing on our plan and they've also received comprehensive briefing documents including technical checks, Mr. Speaker, background, demonstrating the reductions that are going to be happening, Mr. Speaker. I know our plan, Mr. Speaker, is going to offer real relief, Mr. Speaker, for all of our families and small businesses and farms right across the province. I know the opposition parties, Mr. Speaker, they're putting forward nothing but platitudes, Mr. Speaker. Our plan is going to make sure that we bring forward real relief. For families, for small businesses, for farms right across T province, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to make sure it happens before summer.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, from 2011 to 2015, the hospital in Sault Ste. Marie saw their hydro bill rise by \$2.7 million, an increase of 45% in just four short years, while their hydro consumption during that time frame remained exactly the same. Since the Premier refuses to release her plan, will she be running an ad soon to let hospitals like the one in the sioux know they're going to see relief on their hydro bills any time soon?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know the third party needs to stop misleading Ontarians about the health care -- I will withdraw. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Confusing Ontarians about our health care system, Mr. Speaker. Since coming into office, we've increased hospital funding by 54%, allowing us to treat more patients, provide better care and reduce wait times to some of the shortest in the country, Mr. Speaker. Now I know both opposition parties are curious -- furiously trying to muddy the record by not necessarily confusing the impact of energy costs, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that hospitals spent 1.6%, on average, of their total operating budgets on electricity. That means well over 95% of hospital budgets go towards the rest, Mr. Speaker, hiring nurses and doctors, keeping wait times low and ensuring access -- patients have access to that high-quality service that they need. Mr. Speaker, hospitals are also eligible for the save on energy program and I'll talk more about that in the supplementary.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, it's not just families at home, businesses or hospitals that are suffering either. Municipalities are also worried about whether the Premier's \$40 billion borrowing deal will actually help them keep community facilities open. When I met with leaders from Echo Bay, Deborah, St. Joseph, and Wabano First Nation not long ago they all told me skyrocketing hydro rates are on the verge of closing their local arenas or community centres. Since this Premier refuses to release the details of her \$40 billion borrowing plan, will she run an ad soon to let local municipal leaders know they're going to get some real relief from soaring hydro bills and be able to keep community centres like arenas open?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by saying, since forming government,

we've increased municipal support to nearly four times what it was in 2003. So you know, Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous Conservative government which downloaded billions of dollars on costs onto the backs of municipalities and residential property taxpayers, we are alleviating the financial burden off of our municipal partners, Mr. Speaker. Residents in every single one of Ontario's 444 municipalities, Mr. Speaker, will benefit from the fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker. Talking about municipalities, I know the mayor in Hamilton was in the news recently talking about our fair hydro plan. He said a 25% reduction is a very positive step for the city's hydro customers. And he credited our government with listening to Ontarians and implementing what he called dramatic reductions. Mr. Speaker, this is the mayor of the leader of the third party's own city, Mr. Speaker. So it begs the question, Mr. Speaker, come when this legislation is brought forward -- Will they support this and will they follow the advice of the mayor of Hamilton and make sure they support us in supporting this 25% reduction --

MPP Fedeli to Minister Hoskins Re: North Bay Regional Health Centre

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you and good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Over the last five years, 350 frontline health care workers have been cut from the North Bay regional health centre. That includes 100 nurses and 60 beds have been closed in this new hospital. This week, between 30 and 40 more health care workers will be sent home. Speaker, we can't take much more of this in North Bay. Their jobs are being lost as a direct result of Liberal waste, mismanagement and scandal. To add to their troubles, the hospital has seen a hydro increase of 65% over the last six years. The hospital C.E.O. Says that with these latest cuts, he's starting to be very worried about patient care. My question to the Premier is this -- do you care enough about the patients in North Bay to do something?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're proud, and I think the member opposite, if asked, would admit as well, proud of that brand-new facility in North Bay. The hospital that's providing excellent -- the highest quality of care and that has never been in question, Mr. Speaker, and never been in doubt. Last year in the budget, in the budget that they of course voted down, where we allocated \$345 million new dollars to hospitals, that included, Mr. Speaker, a 2% increase in the funding that we provided to North Bay regional health centre. We have funded it, increased the funding year over year over year so that they can address those pressures that they naturally do face, Mr. Speaker, but continue to provide the highest quality of care to the community that they serve. They have approached the ministry, Mr. Speaker, in this current fiscal year, and happy to address that in the supplementary.

>> MPP Fedeli: Thank you. Back to the Premier. With the \$107 million cut from the O.L.G. Funding to hospitals, virtually the same dollars are being reallocated every year, and most of the funds get distributed to the high growth areas. But even though our communities in the north are not growing, our seniors are aging. We also have a higher incidence of many chronic diseases in the north, and because of these extra costs and increased hydro bills, the hospital didn't quite balance their budget this year. That makes them ineligible for the \$7 million in working capital relief. They're in a no-win downward spiral. My question to the Premier is simple -- will she rihad Mitt North Bay regional health centre into the relief program allowing them to hit their targets and stop this downward cycle?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we have received a request from the hospital. We're working closely with them and with the Ihin in strong collaboration and partnership, which I should point out, Mr. Speaker, something that that party, when they were in government in North Bay absolutely did not do. In 2001, North Bay hospital saved a \$6.5 million deficit, and -- faced. And at the time Mike Harris said quote, North Bay, sturgeon falls and mattawa that have deficits are not going to be able to be funded in future years, Mr. Speaker, making it clear that the P.C. Government would not work with hospitals to maintain services. We don't work that way, Mr. Speaker. We're working closely with the hospitals today.

MPP Horwath to Minister Ballard Re: Housing Costs

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: For the Premier, Speaker. Today the NDP Will introduce a rent protection for all tenants act. This act will close the loophole that allows landlords in buildings built later than 1991 to hike rents as much as they want whenever they want. We hear from families that say these increases are chasing them from their homes, Speaker, the place they're raising their kids. Will the Premier close this unfair loophole to protect renters in Ontario?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. It's a very good question. You know, it's really unsafeable that so many Ontarians are faced with housing costs that are rising so dramatically. You know families on tight budgets really are feeling the pinch of a rental market that is struggling to keep up with demand. So we've been already working on a number of areas. Since last June, we've been consulting with tenants and landlords and others right across the province looking at the residential tenancy act and what we'll be able to do to tweak that to make things better. We've passed the inclusionary zoning that will allow municipalities, another tool for municipalities to use to construct affordable housing. There's a whole number of things, a whole host of things I'd love to go down this with, Mr. Speaker, and I'll do that in the supplementary.

>> Andrea Horwath: Let's hope it doesn't take them as long as it took for inclusionary zoning, Speaker, to fix the 1991 rule. The fact is that many Ontario House holds are at a tipping point right now, Speaker. Some people are seeing rent increases of hundreds of dollars if not \$1,000. More and more working people are being forced to couch surf or even return to their parents' home, Speaker. Premier Wynne has said for years that -- rather Premier Wynne has had a number of years, Speaker, already to fix this problem, but instead is leaving millions of they're residents, Ontario's renters in the lurch. My question is why has she failed to take action thus far?

>> Minister Ballard: Well, thank you again for that follow-up question. This government has done a number of very important things, Speaker. On top of talking with landlords and tenants right across the province about issues they face every day, especially around the residential tenancy act. I mentioned inclusionary zoning. I can talk about how we have frozen the municipal property tax on apartment buildings to provide relief to renters. We've doubled the maximum refund for first-time home buyers. Right now, Speaker, we're Collecting data to better understand Ontario's housing market. But when it comes to the -- when it comes to the exemption, the 1991 exemption, Mr. Speaker, you know we have said that we will be expanding on that and we will bring legislation that deals with that, along with the R.T.A.. So we are listening, Speaker. We know the problem people face not only in Toronto but right across Ontario and we're taking action.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Sousa Re: Housing Costs

>> MPP Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of finance. Minister, increases in home prices in rents have made housing affordability a concern for a growing number of people. In fact it's an issue that I've heard from my constituents about time and time again. A year ago in my riding, my office was unable to find even a single room to rent for a constituent with a budget of \$500 a month and prices have only skyrocketed since then., Mr. Speaker, I frequently hear from young families looking to buy the first home, who are having a challenging time getting into the market in the greater Toronto area. Could the Minister please explain what steps our government has taken to improve housing affordability?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Understand that housing affordability has become a significant issue, not just for those families living in the greater Toronto area but in many communities across the province. It's why our government doubled the maximum refund for the land transfer tax rebate of \$4,000. We doubled that refund more than half of first-time home buyers now in Ontario will pay no

L.P. T. On the purchase of their first home. We also know that renters are struggling to find affordable places to live, which is why we are decreasing municipal property taxes on apartment buildings to give relief to renters. Mr. Speaker, we're also participating very closely alongside the B.C. Government, as well as cities of Toronto and Vancouver, in a federal working group in the housing market. Thank you.

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Minister of finance. I'm please today hear that the government is taking steps to address this issue. That extra money could be parked towards closing costs, a larger down payment or new appliances for a first-time buyer's home. I'm also happy to hear that the government is continuing to work on further ways to make it more affordable for Ontarians to buy a home. Mr. Speaker, I know that our government has been participating alongside the B.C. Government, the cities of Toronto and Vancouver in a federal housing market working group to look up further ways to improve affordability. Could the Minister please provide an update as to how he is working with other levels of government to help make housing more affordable for the people in Ontario.

>> Minister Sousa: Thank you to the member from Barrie. Mr. Speaker, I'm certain the housing -- uncertainty in the housing market has been partially driven by economics. T.D. Economics released a special report today arguing the heightened uncertainty in the market can be largely attributed to speculation. There are a number of investment in the housing market that could raise revenue to support other housing affordability measures. It's why I sent a letter to the federal Minister of finance to request that the federal government consider increasing the capital gains inclusion rate for nonprincipal residences. Under the current rule, when you sell a home that is not your principal residence for -- residence for a profit only 50% of the capital gain is included in taxable income. Mr. Speaker, this change will be an important step toward keeping our country's housing market stable and curbing price acceleration. I look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with the federal government to make housing more affordable for Ontario families. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Scott to Minister Naqvi Re: Judges and Sexual Assault Sensitivity Training

>> MPP Laurie Scott: My question's to the Premier. We all know that sexual assault is a big problem in our communities and that our public institutions haven't always shown the proper sensitivity in responding to this crime. Two weeks ago the federal House of commons gave unanimous support to a bill that would require would-be judges to receive sexual assault training. But last week victim service organizations were disappointed to hear that the government of Ontario has no plans to follow suit in making sexual assault training mandatory for its judicial appointees. Why won't the government take the issue of sexual assault seriously and require potential judges to receive the training they need to properly handle sensitive sexual assault cases?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. And I thank the member opposite for this question. It's a very important issue. Speaker, I know it's an issue that all members of this legislature and Ontarians in general are always concerned about. Speaker, we know that sexual assault is a serious issue that demands attention from all levels of government. And that's why, Speaker, I'm very proud that our government, through introduce it's never ok strategy, it's a \$41 million action plan, Speaker, to stop sexual violence. It's our Premier who's taken a leadership role in ensuring that we have robust programs to ensure that we put an end to sexual violence and harassment in our province. As a result of that plan, Speaker, we have launched free independent legal advice pilot program for survivors of sexual assault. 100 people so far, Speaker, have accessed the program. We have increased funding to the 42 sexual assault centres across Ontario. By \$1.75 million, Speaker, for a total of \$14.8 million, and we have passed legislation. Removing Barriers for survivors of sexual assault.

>> MPP Scott: Well, Mr. Speaker, requiring judges to be trained to handle sexual assault cases is right thing to be doing. Alluding to the fact judges can be trained through ads is quite an incredible answer the Minister of Attorney General. In fact train he -- training judges would actually strengthen

Ontario's trust in the judicial system. If Ontarians knew that judges were trained to handle sexual assault cases with the proper sensitivity, maybe more victims would be willing to come forward. So again to the Premier -- will she accept the common sense proposal to require our judges to be trained to handle sexual assault cases since the Minister of the Attorney General is not saying yes, Mr. Speaker ?

>> Minister Naqvi: Speaker, this is a very serious issue, an issue that is not partisan in nature whatsoever, Speaker. I'm very proud of our Premier for taking a leadership role when it comes to a very definitive action plan on putting an end to sexual violence and harassment in our province. Speaker, what we also have to be mindful of is that we have an independent judiciary. We have to respect the independent judiciary. When it comes to training and education of our judiciary, that is an independent matter, Speaker. That is decided upon by the chief justices of the superior court of justice and the Ontario court of justice. Speaker, in Ontario judge function separately and independently of the government and training and education are within their exclusive jurisdiction. However, Speaker, we're always open to talking about more training around sexual violence and harassment, Speaker.

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins Re: Private Health Clinics

>> MPP France Gelinas: Merci, monsieur president.

[Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier.

[End of Translation] Growing number of private clinics are running a second tier of health services in our province. These elite private clinics can charge up to \$4,000 a year for members to get faster access to physicians or faster access to M.R.I. Or both. It's called queue jumping, Speaker. Does the Premier think that this is right -- that it is right to force most people to wait longer for the health care that they need while rich people can buy their way to the front of the line? And if not, then why is the Premier letting private clinics undermine our public health care here in Ontario?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know, like myself the member opposite is absolutely committed to medicare and to the Canada health act and to the principles behind that. I think and I would hope that she knows she's -- she's been watching my performance as health Minister for almost three years now. I hope that she also sees those principles in action. The importance to me personally and professionally as a health care provider, as she is, to health equity, to ensuring that those vulnerable individuals, those that truly and most need access to health services, that that's where we focus our attention. That on that incredibly important issue of access as well, that it is fair and equal and equitable access, Mr. Speaker. We are closely monitoring some activities that are taking place, including -- What she's just referenced, Mr. Speaker, and we're looking to ensure that those principles are upheld.

>> MPP Gelinas: Speaker, I've been bringing this issue of the private clinic growing in Ontario for the last five years. This is a long time to monitor what's going on. Ask any mom in Ontario how long it takes to get an appointment with their family physician for her sick child. It can take weeks. But under the Liberals, people can pay a private clinic for 24/7 access to a doctor. Ask any seniors how long it takes to get an M.R.I. I went on the website today. Average wait time 106 days. But at the private clinic, people can pay to get an M.R.I. Within one or two days. Forcing everybody else to wait longer. Speaker, when you need access to high-quality health care in Ontario, you should be asked for your health card, not your credit card. Does the Premier think that patients in Ontario should pay up or wait longer. For the health care that they need?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess my memory must be failing me because, in the three years that I've been health Minister, the member opposite has not raised this issue with me, by my recollection, at all in the three-year period. But, Mr. Speaker, now that it is in the "Toronto Star," I know that she's seen it as an important issue, as do we, and that's why in 2004, Mr. Speaker, we introduced legislation that made it illegal for any person or entity to charge or accept any benefit for

insured service in addition to the amount that is paid by ohip. We also made it illegal, Mr. Speaker, for any person to pay, charge or receive payment or other benefits to receive special or expedited access to the medicare system. However, Mr. Speaker, this is important to this government, as demonstrated by the legislation in 2004. We are continuing to watch this very, very closely to ensure that it does not violate that act. And the Canada health act.

MPP Potts to Minister McMahon Re: Celebrate Ontario

>> MPP Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of tourism, culture and sport. We know the Ontario festivals and the events we have here attract tourists for tens of thousands of jobs and generate millions in economic growth. And I'm very proud to be part of a government that supports these events. So people can be drawn and visit and celebrate in our community. In my own riding of Beaches- East York I'm very pleased to know that we're assisting with the Canadian food truck festival. The Toronto local arts festival called sing which celebrates a cappella music. Woofstock. The iconic Beaches international jazz festival and of course Caribana which has had a long history in the city of Toronto. We have been seeing these festivals and we know these events play a fundamental role in our cultural and economic vitality. So, Speaker, I'm pleased to answer the Minister today about announcement she made that is -- last Monday at mil's hardware in Hamilton. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister tell the members of this House more about what was announced on Monday. And how celebrate Ontario is many proving our community?

>> Minister McMahon: I want to thank the member for East York for his championing of events in his riding. Earlier this month I was with sonic unyon, an annual festival that transforms Jane street into a weekend-long celebration of the arts. Here visitors can see great musical acts, unique art installations and experience amazing local food and craft beer, right in the heart of downtown Hamilton. Super crawl's been around for almost a decade now and has grown into a must see for music and art lovers. Speaker, we're proud to be supported super crawl with half a million dollars over two years along with five other initiatives in Hamilton. In participating events like super crawl visitors might make a stop at the fabulous art gallery of Hamilton, theatre aquarius to pillars of the local arts and culture scene. We know these events draw tourists but we're also investing in a growing cultural scene. I'm proud our contributions to such a culture scene and looking forward to the impact celebrate Ontario is making across Ontario.

>> MPP Potts: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for her answer and for incredible championing of events all across Ontario. So many festivals and events like super crawl and north by northeast, which also -- up in Thunder Bay, the world junior baseball classic, are having a very positive impact on the music and culture scenes of Ontario. Across the province celebrate Ontario 2017 means that organizers can now enhance their programming, their activities and their services. They now offer new and enhanced experiences that attract even more tourists and increase visitor spending. I know that celebrate Ontario will have a very positive economic impact in every corner of the province in 2017, our 150 celebratory year. From food festivals, music festivals to events that teach us about our heritage and cultural diversity, our communities will benefit from increased tourism and visitor spending right across the province. Speaker, through to you in the Minister, will she update the members of this House on economic impact expected from celebrate Ontario events this summer?

>> Minister McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you again to the member for the question. Our government understands the important role that festivals and events play in bringing communities together and supporting local businesses. In this respect celebrate Ontario has been enormously successful. Later this afternoon I'll be in Markham along with Minister CHAN to highlight the multicultural aspects of celebrate Ontario. In fact every dollar of celebrate Ontario funding triggers almost \$20 of expenditures supporting thousands of jobs and generating millions of dollars in revenue. These festivals enhance quality of life and attract investment too. Knowing the strength of this program and the important opportunity we have especially in our government is investing more than 1s -- \$19 million across Ontario supporting over 300 festivals and events, a

record number in the history of Ontario, Speaker. We're proud of this, Speaker. We're also proud that we're doing a tremendous amount in local and northern communities. Thank you very much.

MPP Walker to Minister Hoskins Re: Long-Term Care Home Funding

>> MPP Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Today we heard the Ontario long-term care association how this government has abdicated its responsibility to properly fund long-term care leaving hundreds of thousands of seniors -- the care that they need and deservable. 11,000 people, myself included, signed a petition to call on you to stand up for seniors by ensuring funding for fundamentals like food and hydro in nursing homes, never getting fall below inflation. On behalf of all of them I ask will the Minister commit to providing stable and predictable funding to support the needs of those most vulnerable seniors entrusted in his care?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, of course this government is committed to providing that ongoing and stable funding to seniors and others that reside in L. -- Long-term care homes across this province. Now that's partly why we made -- and I just referenced the 3.7% increase in the raw food diet in last year's budget. That's why we have committed by 2025 to redeveloping 30,000 new long-term care beds. That's why in fact since coming into office in 2003, Mr. Speaker, we have built more than 10,000 new beds in long-term care. And I have a list here. The member opposite wants to see precisely where those beds have been built. More than 10,000 since coming into office, Mr. Speaker. We are committed. We are providing those resources in a sustainable fashion.

>> MPP Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to see lists because I've been asking for two years in estimates and I've got nothing from you. And you spend more money in prisons than you do seniors. Mr. Speaker, the Minister's chronic underfunding has resulted in a lack of staff, lack of behavioural supports, increased the tax. 30,000 outdated beds and record high wait list of 26,500 seniors. Shameful and that list can grow to 50,000 in the next six years. The message is clear. Anything less than the rate of inflation is setting up our valued seniors needing long-term care support for big disaster. So again I ask, will the Minister insure our seniors' hopes have the means to provide better care by committing to funding them especially food and hydro, at a minimum for inflationary increases each and every year?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I value the partnership that we have with those that are in that important position of providing long-term care to the residents of this province. And I appreciate -- I greatly appreciate the submission that they've made the prebudget submission where they speak to the importance not only of the quantum that's provided, the dollar amount that's provided for residents, and we provide roughly \$52,000 a year per resident per home, Mr. Speaker, and in a number of categories. But it's also I particularly appreciate when they were talking about the aspect of predictable and sustainable. And I've been working with them, and it's important for us to see if we can find a way, Mr. Speaker, that we cannot only meet that sustainable requirement but that we can do it in a way which gives them predictability into the future with regards to what they can expect. So they can plan for that increase, Mr. Speaker.

MPP French to Minister Coteau Re: Children's Autism Services

>> MPP Jennifer French: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Hidden deep within last year's budget was this government's inexplicable decision to cancel autism therapy for children over the age of 5. After blindsiding families that had spent years waiting for services, the decision was finally reversed. Under enormous pressure from across the province. Or so they claim. Now almost a year later, evidence is emerging that many children over the age of 5 are still being denied services, therapies and hope. Speaker, what does the Premier have to say to the families of children with

autism that have had the rug pulled out from under them a second time?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank the member for the question. As the member knows, this is an important issue. As a government, we see this as one of our top priorities when it comes to working with families here in the province of Ontario. And that's why, Mr. Speaker, we invested half a billion dollars of new money into this program. Mr. Speaker, by doing this, what we're doing is creating 16,000 new spaces across the province of Ontario. We're looking at providing diagnostic and testing early and creating more spots for that so young people get the type of services they need. And the member knows opposite that we've committed to launching a new program in June that will address many of the issues that this province has taken on not only through this government's tenure but many, many years, decades, Mr. Speaker. So I'm quite proud of the direction we're in. And I would hope if the member opposite really wants to be briefed on where we are and our progress she can sit down with me any time and get that type of information in detail.

>> MPP French: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. Ontarians are tired of being fooled. In an open letter to the Minister of children and youth services, concerned parents of children with autism noted that wait lists are still growing. Services are still being reduced, and families have been left in the dark about how this will affect their children's lives. Every child in Ontario deserves the right to reach their full potential on their terms, not on your terms. Will the Premier do what she promised for families and commit to actually reinstating the services for these children?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I've been across this province and I've talked to parents. I've met with parents in many jurisdictions. In fact I've met with parents that are from the member opposite's jurisdiction, parents from Ottawa, in the Durham region, and, Mr. Speaker, I've met parents and they're very thankful for the direction we're taking. I get phone calls. I get e-mails. I speak to parents directly and they're happy about the direction we're going. I just want to give you some of the latest direct funding numbers that we have here, Mr. Speaker. So we've had almost 2,300 families sign up for the 8,000 initial payment. We've got 775 families that opt in receiving the \$10,000. These numbers continue. You know, Mr. Speaker, the families that were on the wait list can supply for the 8,000 and the 10 and then 10 and it continues until their services are necessary. So I would hope the member opposite would wait until June to see what the new program is like and then from there we can have a conversation about how we go forward. Thank you.

MPP Martins to Minister Mauro Re: Ontario Home Builders Association

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of municipal affairs. Minister, the building industry plays a key role in the lives of Ontarians. They build the places where we live, work and spend our free time and they help shape our communities, including my own community of Davenport. Today the Ontario home builders' association is here at Queen's Park. The Ontario home builders' association was formed in 1962 to give residential builders a voice in the provincial government and to facilitate changes in the industry. Their members build the homes that shape our communities, Mr. Speaker, and they have been an important voice in the province. I understand that they have been engaged on a number of government priorities over the years, including updates to the province's building codes. Would the Minister for municipal affairs speak about how the Ontario home builders association has contributed to the decision of government priorities?

>> Minister Mauro: Speaker, thank you very much. I want to thank the member for the question, Speaker, and I want to begin by ensuring that all members of the legislature are aware that tonight there's a reception with the Ontario home builders starting around 5:00 this evening in the legislative dining room downstairs. We hope to see everybody there. Speaker, in my first go-around in this ministry back in 2014, it was a pleasure for me to meet through that experience the Ontario home builders for the first time and have an opportunity to announce our six-storey wood frame construction in the province of Ontario, intended to help the forestry sector but also let, Speaker, I

would say from my perspective an unintended consequence at the time I tabled my private member's bill, to see an ability to increase the amount of affordable housing in the province of Ontario that came forward as a result of that. Point being, Speaker, through that process, we were able to have significant consultations with the Ontario home building association. As one of our key stakeholders. It's helped to forge that relationship with our government, and I look forward to talking more about that stakeholder consultation in the supplementary.

>> MPP Martins: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister for his answer. Our government is currently conducting coordinated review of the growth plan, greenbelt plan, Oak Ridges moraine plan and niagara escarpment plan. These plans work together to protect our natural resources like prime farmland, make efficient use of existing infrastructure and prevent sprawl by directing growth to already built-up areas. The coordinated review is the legislated 10-year review of these plans. I understand that our government will introduce updated plans in the coming months and that these plans will be the result of extensive consultation dating back to 2015, which includes a report from an advisory committee and nearly six-month public consultation period in 2016. I also understand that the Ontario home builders' association has been involved in the process throughout. Would the Minister elaborate. On how the Ontario home builders' association has contributed its -- its expertise during the consultation process?

>> Minister Mauro: Speaker, again thanks to the member for the question. She is right. The ohba has been a significant stakeholder for us through this particular review. It's a good chance for me to give a shout-out to that panel chaired by David Crombie and included Leif Moore who was the past president. Neil Rogers, recently elected as the 50th president of the O.H.B.A.. And give a shout out to the C.E.O. Joe Mckerrow as well. The member has mentioned they are significant stakeholder for us in this process. We're aware the ohba has some 4,000 members. They've built 400,000 homes in Ontario in the last ten years and, Speaker, they are a significant contributor to the economy of Ontario. Somewhere in the range of \$45 billion to our economy every year. So yes, they have played a significant role in our work on the coordinated land use review. We look forward to coming forward with those plans in the near future and we want to thank them and all stakeholders for their input in this process.

MPP Hardeman to Minister Thibeault (Duguid) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Ernie Hardeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. One of the largest employers in my riding said I'm a single hydro bill charged for electricity used was \$38,000. But when they add on the government global adjustment and other charges, the final monthly bill was -- listen to this, Premier -- \$385,000. They run 24 hours a day to deliver just in time to car plants. So they can't shift production to use the I.C.I. Program. Can the Premier explain why this major employer is paying more than \$350,000, or 90% of their hydro bill for government's extra billing charges?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very please today rise and talk about the programs that are out there that actually are helping businesses, Mr. Speaker. I do hope that this one business will actually utilize many of the programs that are out there, Mr. Speaker, to actually help them save dollars. Mr. Speaker, there's the I.E.P. Program, Mr. Speaker. There's the industrial accelerator program. There are many other programs that are out there that actually help small businesses and help our medium size manufacturing businesses, Mr. Speaker, ensure that they can -- We recognize, Mr. Speaker, the importance of actually helping our businesses reduce those rates. We've seen many of those businesses right across the province use many of these programs, Mr. Speaker, and it will actually help them reduce their bills. But when it comes to Ontario's fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, we're going to see all of our small businesses. They're going to see that 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker, coming right off and that's something that will help them.

>> MPP Hardeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister obviously missed a comment that I said these programs do not work back in woodstock. The past few months it's been announced

-- back to the Premier, Mr. Speaker. The past few months it's been announced Oxford is losing 1,000 new jobs. This is the government's hydro rate for businesses are putting more of these jobs at risk. And yet the government's hydro announcement does nothing to help the major businesses we have left, which of course would be few tech. Premier, people can't pay their hydro bills if they lose their jobs. What does the Premier have to say to all the people of Oxford who are worried their job will be the next to disappear because of her government's policies?

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, here's what I say to the folks in Oxford and what I say to folks right across this province. We have taken a number of measures to make this province more competitive. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we have the lowest effective corporate tax create, very generous r&d tax credit. We've invested to the tune of \$3.1 billion -- Our investments, Mr. Speaker, with businesses right across this province 3.1 billion since 2004 have accrued to over \$31 billion in private sector investment, 175,000 jobs created and retained. So where are we, Mr. Speaker? We have not had a lowered unemployment rate in a decade. Mr. Speaker, not in a decade. Leading the G-7 in growth. We've created 700,000 jobs, and for the first time in 13 years, Mr. Speaker. We've seen seven consecutive --

MPP Sattler to Minister Hoskins Re: Mental Health Services Funding

>> MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, there is an ongoing crisis in mental health services in London that shows no sign of improving. The on done health sciences centre -- the London health sciences centre psychiatric E.R. Regularly operates at 130% capacity. Before the March break lhse reported that there were 22 mental health patients waiting for beds, some for more than 7 days on hallway stretchers or in overflow rooms. Last week my constituent, Angela jolly, waited five days in the hallway before she was even assigned a doctor. Speaker, lhse psychiatrist Dr. Banjabby tells me it comes down to funding needed for more beds, more nurses, community services. London's mental health crisis has been raised numerous times in this legislature and in the London media. So why, Speaker, does this government refuse to act?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We absolutely are acting. In fact we've made unprecedented investments in mental health right across this province. Just a number of weeks ago, an important announcement for 1150 new supportive housing units to add to the 1,000 that were announced last year, Mr. Speaker, where we've announced for the first time any jurisdiction in Canada. We're providing government-funded, publicly funded cognitive behavioural therapy. In London itself, Mr. Speaker, not only do they benefit from the supportive housing and are benefitting, but has we opened up a crisis centre, which provides that critically important alternative to hospitalization or visits to E.R.s where there are strong communicate supports. And experts in place that can provide that resource that individuals in crisis so definitely need, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, Londoners must wait six months or more to see an outpatient psychiatrist and the 24/7 crisis centre that the Minister mentioned was at capacity almost from the moment it opened its doors. About one third of the people who access the crisis centre are diverted from E.R., but fully two-thirds are first-time users of the mental health system, and the \$10 million that was promised more than a year ago for additional stabilization beds have yet to appear. Will the Premier commit today to releasing that funding for those stabilization beds now to the crisis centre? And more importantly will she come to London and meet with the nurses and the physicians and the patients who are struggling to deal with this desperate situation?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, that \$1.2 million that we invested in the London crisis centre is obviously making an important difference to individuals in that community. But we're also working with the hospital, Mr. Speaker. We've provided them with significant new funding, including in mental health. We've committed to or in the middle of a \$140 million new investment in mental health over a three-year period and \$50 million annualized after that. But our funding to the London health sciences centre has increased not only by 73% since we came into office but also significant new investment in funds last year, which will they them deal with that to improve their capacity on

this critically important issue, Mr. Speaker.