

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript - Tuesday, March 28, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Tuesday, March 28, 2017

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MPP Brown to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro One Sale

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. In 2014 research and polling at least in the media had this to say. Most Ontarians would not support the provincial government selling a controlling interest in any of the five crown corporations tested. Three years later, most people don't support the Liberals' short sighted Hydro One fire sale. Mr. Speaker, it is not too late to do the right thing. With the Liberals commit to stopping the fire sale of Hydro One.

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We made a very conscious decision not to do what that party had done with the 407, Mr. Speaker, because there was no benefit to the people of Ontario by that fire sale, Mr. Speaker. And, in fact, the decision that we made about building transit and transportation infrastructure in this province was premised on the understanding that Ontario's economic well-being is at least in part dependent on having the right infrastructure for people to be able to move around, for goods to be able to move, Mr. Speaker, and there had been decades of neglect in terms of building infrastructure in this province. We're patching up, Mr. Speaker. We're doing it in a responsible way. We're seeing the fruits of those investments as Ontario leads economic growth in this country.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier, the government asked that people of Ontario if they support selling Hydro One and the answer was a resounding know. The question, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier needs to answer is why spend hundreds of thousands, possibly millions of dollars on Liberal research firms if you're just going to ignore that advice? Do hundreds of thousands of dollars, do millions of dollars, taxpayer funded, precious, mean nothing to this government? Why help friends and Liberal research firms if you're just going to ignore it? It's not right.

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, there are many, many issues that government has to make decisions on, Mr. Speaker. And it was fundamental to our understanding of the economic needs of this province that we invest in infrastructure. And by infrastrucre, Mr. Speaker, that means transit. It means roads. It means bridges. It means hospitals. It means schools, Mr. Speaker. It means infrastructure across this province. \$160 billion over 12 years is being invested in this province, Mr. Speaker. And as I said, the fruits of those investments are being seen, Mr. Speaker. We have in Ontario created 702,000 new jobs, net new jobs, Mr. Speaker, since the recession. That job creation, Mr. Speaker, is connected to the investments that we have made and the economic growth that we have seen.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier, I ask a serious question about Liberal research being ignored, Liberals patting the backs of their friends. Mr. Speaker, to the Premier, the fact that this Liberal polling is being leaked to the media in itself is interesting. That means at least one Liberal want to do the right thing. At least one Liberal recognizes the fire sale of Hydro One is short sighted. Mr. Speaker, what I would like to know and hopefully the Premier can tell us, which Liberal leadership candidate is the one that leaked this to the media? Because the official opposition, Mr. Speaker, would like to thank that Liberal for doing the right thing. To the Premier, who leaked this to the media?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker you know, there are huge challenges facing governments in 2017, Mr. Speaker. There are issues that have importance for the future economic well-being of this province, Mr. Speaker. And if the leader of the opposition is saying to me, Premier, why don't you

just govern according to the polls, I think that gives us an insight into his -- into the political methodology that he is Mr. Speaker. What we do on this side of the House is we measure and weigh all of the alternatives Mr. Speaker. We take input, of course, from polling, but we take input from business. We take input from economists. We take input from people, Mr. Speaker, and then we make a decision that is going to be in the best interest of this province. That's what we have done. That's what we have made investments in the economy.

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Hoskins) Re: Opioid Crisis

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. We know this Liberal government has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars, nearly a million advertising their hydro hail Mary that is very partisan. Mr. Speaker, how much have they spent advertising the damaging effects of the fentanyl crisis in Ontario.

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has raised a couple of issues, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the opioid crisis that we are seeing in Ontario, Mr. Speaker, and quite frankly across the country. We take it extremely seriously. We understand that there is much that needs to be done. We have, in fact, put in place an opioid strategy, Mr. Speaker. As I said a number of weeks ago, we know we need to work with municipalities to make sure municipalities have the tools that they need and those supports are in place. We will continue to work Mr. Speaker to enhance the strategy that we already have in place working with other jurisdictions and learning from the work that they have done, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier, I have to confess, I already knew the answer. The answer is the government is spending nearly a million on partisan hydro ads and almost nothing when it comes to the crisis. They have spent barely anything to warn Ontarians about the danger of fentanyl. Mr. Speaker, why are these vanity ads, these partisan Liberal hydro ads more important than letting the people of Ontario know about the dangers of the fentanyl crisis?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care wants to week to the investments we are making but I need to comment on the juxtaposition of these two issues. I understand that the leader of the opposition feels that this political rhetoric is helpful in terms of I don't know what, maybe his political future. But Mr. Speaker, the fentanyl crisis in this country, the opioid crisis in this country, it's extremely serious. And all of us should rise above the pettiness of this kind of juxtaposition of issues to focus on what is really important, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier, a 14-year-old just died because of this crisis. The Ontario association of chiefs of police, the Opp, the Ottawa public health all launched some form of an awareness campaign. Crickets from this government. a lethal dose of pure fentanyl is 2 milligrams. Preventable deaths are happening across this province tragically. There is a limited advertising budget. It is being spent according to auditor general on self-congratulatory. My question is direct and clear to the Premier. Will you stop the hydro ads and put every cent into this fentanyl crisis?

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

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, the opioid crisis in this country is something that I think all of us here in the legislature appreciate the seriousness of and that we need to take those important steps to save lives and provide the supports that are particularly our community partners need to be able to address this crisis right across the country, Mr. Speaker. And that's why it's so important that in this province, last October, we addressed this in a multi-faceted way. In fact, I had a meeting just a few days ago with the chief medical officer of health beginning April 1st, hospitals, public health units, ministry of health will have realtime data in terms of the scope of this problem of the depth and the overhead that they place. We're expanding the pain clinics in this province. We made naloxone available free of charge through pharmacies and public health units, Mr. Speaker.

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

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Hydro rates have gone up 300%. Since this Premier took office, they have gone up by 50% alone, Mr. Speaker. It's a startling fact. More startling is what this actually means to Ontario families. It means more people than ever are being forced to choose whether to pay their hydro bills or to put food on the table. When will the Premier do more than buy radio ads and issue press releases as a response to this crisis that her government has created?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, we recognize that electricity prices, that hydro prices, have been a burden for people in all corners of the province, Mr. Speaker, which is exactly why on top of the 8% that we already have cut people's bills by, another 17%, so a total of 25%. People will see that reduction, Mr. Speaker, on their summer bills. But, Mr. Speaker, we started in 2013 recognizing that we needed to take costs out of the system. We have taken a number of actions, Mr. Speaker. But we realize, we realize that even with the accumulation of actions that we have taken in 2013 and 2014 and 2015 that more needed to be done. Our plan will take 25% off the bills of everyone who in their home pays their electricity bills, Mr. Speaker. On top of that, people who live in more remote and rural areas will see another reductions, Mr. Speaker, that could take them up to 40 or 50% reduction.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker does the Premier realize that time of use billing is a big problem for many Ontarians. For a parent who's raising kids means you can't cook dinner at dinnertime. You have to stay up really late at night to do the laundry. That's just not right, Speaker. Can the Premier tell us since she refuses to release the details of her band-aid hydro fix, will it include opportune if I have time of use pricing, Mr. Speaker?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, pleased to rise and talk about Ontario's fair hydro plan. Mr. Speaker, today I have in front of me the technical briefing that was provided to all of the critics of all of the opposition parties in the media, Mr. Speaker. It talks specifically about many of the actions we're taking as a government to reduce the bills of all families, small businesses and farms across the province, Mr. Speaker. Up to 25% for all families, Mr. Speaker. They're going to see that reduction come summer. Also, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to time of use, we're also having pilot projects looked at right now, Mr. Speaker, by our system operator, by the oeb ensuring to find ways to help families and businesses, Mr. Speaker. Our plan is a substantial plan that is bringing relief to families, Mr. Speaker, unlike the opposition party, Mr. Speaker, that has a bumper sticker plan that does absolutely nothing to help families and low income individuals right away, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, people need information from this government. Not a slide that's provided to media and opposition critics. Shame on you. Ontarians need to know what this plan will actually do. Ontarians need to know that, Mr. Speaker, so they have some certainty around the future. The member needs to release publicly the details of her plan in this legislature so that it's available for open and transparent debate instead of playing a game of political smoke in mirrors and spending public money on partisan ads. Enough with the pr, Speaker. When will Ontarians see the Premier's actual plan?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I think it's been well said, the details of our plan, 25% reduction for all families in the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. And for those families, Mr. Speaker, for those families that are in northern Ontario and rural parts of our province, Mr. Speaker, they're going to see more than just 25%, Mr. Speaker. We have actually reduced the distribution rate, Mr. Speaker, for Hydro One customers in seven other lbc's. They will see reductions Mr. Speaker between 40 and 50%, Mr. Speaker. And that's thanks to the action of this government, Mr. Speaker. We have made sure. We have made sure, Mr. Speaker, as well we are looking after low income individuals, our most vulnerable, Mr. Speaker, and our first nations, something that they didn't even include in their plan, Mr. Speaker. We make sure that we have enhanced the Ontario electricity support program. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro One Sale

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is for the Premier. The privatization of our hydro system began under the Progressive Conservatives and clearly the torch has been successfully passed to this Liberal government. But overwhelmingly, the people of this province, an overwhelming majority of Ontarians have made it clear that they want a public hydro system. When will the Premier finally listen and stop the selloff of Hydro One?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, again, I completely understand why the leader of the third party would want to talk about this because she actually has a plan that would increase or do nothing to reduce people's electricity bills. Her proposal would either keep electricity bills at the same cost or increase them, Mr. Speaker. And the issue that she raises today, the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One would not take one cent of one person's electricity bill. In every corner of the province, infrastructure that will allow people to move themselves, their families, their goods more quickly, Mr. Speaker, and will allow this economy to thrive. That's the decision that we made. We're seeing the fruits of that, Mr. Speaker. Having said that, we know electricity bills have to come down. We have the plan that's going to do that, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Mr. Speaker for such a studious Premier, it's shocking and surprising she has not obviously read the NDP Plan apparent through her response. I can tell you this, a quick shot in the arm for a political -- But I can tell you this, a quick shot in the arm for a political party and a leader that's struggling with low popularity should not be the driving force behind the creation of public policy in the province of Ontario. The Premier and her party congratulate themselves regularly on their evidence-based approach to policy making. Can the Premier tell us where is the evidence that continuing the selloff of Hydro One will be good for families or businesses.

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, our -- our fair hydro plan is based on reducing people's electricity costs, Mr. Speaker. That's what it's about. And as I said earlier, we began in 2013 to take costs out of the system, Mr. Speaker, to renegotiate contracts, because we knew that there was a need to reduce those costs so that electricity bills would not go up as quickly and as high. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that there needed to be more done and that's why we made the decisions that we have made. In fact, I have read the NDP Proposal, Mr. Speaker. And I know that what the NDP Proposal will do is make people wait for any change, will not reduce people's electricity bills, and in some cases, Mr. Speaker, will actually increase their bills. That's not a proposal that we would adopt, Mr. Speaker. We're going to see electricity prices come down in this province come the summer all across the province.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, the reality is nobody trusts this Liberal government, and you can see why. You just have to go to the internet, read, and know you can't trust what comes out of this Premier's mouth. The plan is being debated in this House this afternoon unlike the Premier and her party. We're not afraid to give Ontarians a detailed plan or take bold action by doing what people want and bringing Hydro One back into full public ownership. Will the Premier stop her wrong headed selloff of Hydro One, agree to start fixing the systemic problems in the system that started with them -- continuing with them and actually support our plan, which is the only plan that addresses the systemic problems, gives people relief on their bills and is, in fact, the only plan on the table.

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So let me just say back to the leader of the third party, I think it would be very helpful if she would explain to the people of Ontario how one cent would come off one electricity bill if we made the changes she's suggesting by Hydro One. I would like the leader of the third party -- Let me ask the leader of the third party why in her proposal there is no mention of first nations, Mr. Speaker, we're actually removing distribution costs, delivery charges from first nations communities, Mr. Speaker. And I would like furthermore like to ask the leader of the third party why she would make low income users of electricity in the province wait, Mr. Speaker, why she doesn't have a plan that would be immediate for low income users, Mr. Speaker? The reality is that we did a lot of work to come up with proposals that actually would lower people's electricity prices, Mr. Speaker. That is not what the NDP Has done. I understand why. They want to

talk about Hydro One and why they want to talk about their proposal, Mr. Speaker. But the fact is what they're proposing will not reduce people's electricity bills. Ours will, Mr. Speaker. We're going to go with our plan.

MPP Harris to Minister Del Duca Re: Vaughn GO Station

>>MPP Michael Harris: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of transportation. We learned of the approval of a go station in the riding of Vaughan despite government's own expert analysis indicating that the station would mean longer travel times, force current go passengers back onto the road and result in a \$43 million loss. Mr. Speaker, was the station approved by the Minister put the interest of seeing a Steve del Duca name plate ahead of interests of riders in the province of Ontario?

>>Minister Steven Del Duca: Thank you very much, Speaker. I thank the member for the question. I'm delighted to have the opportunity to stand in my place and talk about the incredible plan that our Premier and our government have to invest and expand public transit in every community, not only in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area but across the province of Ontario. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank local individuals working hard, including my mayor, John Mackenzie, our commissioner of planning, city of Vaughan ward 1 councillor Marilyn who had been working hard for a number of months with the folks at metrolinx to make sure it's clearly unds over the next ten years approximately 35,000 people will be moving into the area immediately adjacent proposed to where this proposed go station will be built Speaker. Our government understands the importance of building public transit not only to meet the demands of today but for the demands of tomorrow, Speaker. And we're going to continue with that job.

>>MPP Harris: The station is right in the Minister 's backyard. In fact, the government's own business case stated, quote, the benefits concluded be realized are not large enough to outweigh the anticipated impacts to go transit and the economy. So I ask again, why does the Minister seem more interested in his backyard station to boost his own political fortunes than in the best interest of transit riders here in the province of Ontario?

>> Minister Del Duca: Yeah, Speaker, look, I want to follow up. I'm extraordinarily proud to represent the community of Vaughan here, Mr. Speaker. And I look forward -- I look forward to making it very clear to the people of maple and pineburg and southern King over the next 15 months that that leader and that party are opposed to building more transit infrastructure in that community Mr. Speaker. I will also note, I didn't actually hear that member from Kitchener-conestoga ever say a bad word about our decision to build a station at breslau in his riding, Mr. Speaker. Thanks very much.

MPP Gelinis to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Wait Times

>> MPP France Gelinis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All hospitals are facing an overcrowding crisis that keeps getting worse. Last week, 94-year-old Margaret Otto was brought by ambulance to an overcrowded hospital. Margaret had to lie on a stretcher in the busy emergency room for many long hours. It was noisy. She couldn't rest. As her daughter, Patricia, says, it's pretty sad that a woman of her age in her condition cannot get a hospital room. When will the Premier stop forcing seniors like Margaret to be treated in hallways and do something to solve the overcrowding crisis that they have created?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: We have a strategy to address the occupancy rates in our hospitals. It includes increasing investments in the operating budgets as well as unprecedented capital investments in this province, Mr. Speaker, over \$10 million over the next decade in hospital investments. Increased the operating budgets of hospitals last year alone or this fiscal year by nearly half a billion. It's important that Ontarians understand that the vast majority of hospitals in this province regularly and routinely operate within the less than 100 percent occupancy rate, Mr. Speaker. There's work to be done. We're proud of the fact that year over year we're seeing from third parties, cihi to the wait times alliance to the Fraser institute. Improvements in er wait times as

well. There's more work to be done. Those are the reasons for the investments we're making.

>> MPP Gelinas: Speaker, patients in Ottawa like Margaret Otto are being treated in hallways. Overcrowding caused the hospital to cancel 36 planned surgeries in recent months alone. It is not just the people of Ottawa who are suffering from overcrowding created by this Liberal government. The Ontario hospital association says emergency wait times in Ontario are the longest on record. Speaker, this is our Premier's legacy, overcrowded hospitals, seniors on stretches, cancelled surgeries, long wait times for families across the province. As Margaret's daughter Patricia says, it is a sad state of affairs. Nobody can deny it. When will the Premier stop squeezing our hospitals and put an end to hallway medicine in this province?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that we acknowledge that we have one of the best healthcare systems in this country. Not world. Obviously the member opposite hasn't read today's Cihl report, a third party report, that offers independent third party proof that our government has made tremendous and continues to make tremendous progress since 2003 in improving wait times. 85% of hip replacements in Ontario are completed within the medical benchmark, 6% higher than the national average. 81% of knee replacement within the medical benchmark, 12% better than the national average. 99% of radiation therapy beginning within the medical benchmark, we also beat the national average on this metric. It's consistent with the Fraser report last fall Mr. Speaker that showed our wait times in ERs are improving despite more patients. We're seeing reductions in wait times across the board, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Milczyn to Minister Hoskins (Naidoo-Harris) Re: Patient Sexual Abuse

>>MPP Peter Milczyn: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. A member from the official opposition said something extremely concerning. The Conservative member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills made comments critical of a zero tolerance policy for the sexual abuse of patients. The member said, zero tolerance, he finds that dangerous. The member went on to say that he believes, and I quote, "Consideration of leniency, understanding and tolerance." I found these statements not only shocking. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I found that statement shocking. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please explain to this House what exactly a zero tolerance policy is and how it will protect patients from sexual abuse?

>>Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you, the member, for giving me the opportunity to respond to this very important question. Let me be as clear as possible. Our government has a zero tolerance policy for sexual abuse. That includes zero tolerance for criminal sexual behaviour of any kind, regardless of position, title, or occupation. Our government is committed to protecting the safety and well-being of all Ontarians. Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Health my priority is protecting patients. This is exactly why our government has introduced bill 87. It is absolutely and unequivocally unacceptable. Mr. Speaker, zero tolerance means just that. Zero tolerance for any form of sexual abuse of any kind by anyone, period.

>>MPP Milczyn: Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care for the answer. If you are not speaking out, helping the victims or survivor, you're happy the perpetrator. I'm proud to be part of a government standing up for survivors. I'm proud on this side of the House we recognize the need for zero tolerance when it comes to sexual abuse. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can he update the House on what we are doing to support survivors of sexual abuse?

>>Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's vital we make it clear we have a zero tolerance for abuse. But the reality is one in three women will experience some form of violence in their lifetime. And that's unacceptable. That's why we launched it's never okay, an action plan to stop sexual violence and harassment. The who will help and it's never okay campaign sparked conversations in Ontario and around the world. Speaker, we are supporting people who have experienced sexual assault through programs that build partnerships between community.

MPP Lisa MacLeod to Minister Naqvi Re: Mental Health Crisis

>> MPP Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question is to the auditor general. The government has failed Ontarians suffering from mental health issues in recent months. I just want to point out to our own city of Ottawa, three suicides within three months at the Ottawa detention centre. Mr. Speaker, is this the Ontario that those struggling with mental illness should expect to live in?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for the opportunity to answer this very important question. Speaker, I can tell the member opposite and all the members of this House that our government is very much focussed on making sure that we have the right kind of supports for individuals with mental health and addictions services. I know the Minister of community and correctional services is focussed on ensuring we have appropriate training for correctional officers around mental health, that we have specialized nurses in our correctional facilities that have training around mental health so that those services can be provided and the work being done, Speaker, through Mr. Howard sapers, the former correctional investigator from the federal government is very much focussed we when it comes to dealing with issues around segregation there are appropriate services available. That work is ongoing in consultation with the Minister of health so we have robust services for mental health in our correctional facilities.

>> MPP MacLeod: What concerns me is clearly the supports and services aren't there. One individual, and I quote, was only was in the detention centre because there was no bed available at the Royal Ottawa mental health centre, which is where he was supposed to be undergoing the assessment. How many more deaths will it take before the government shows concrete action with clear supports and services for those suffering?

>> Minister Naqvi: Speaker, our government continues to make investments in making sure that we have appropriate supports available, not only in our correctional facilities when it comes to supports for mental health but also at the community level. The work that my ministry is doing through our bill action plan is focussed on ensuring that we have appropriate mental health supports available in the community by working with organizations like in Ottawa John Howard society. Those individuals who are low risk or vulnerable are not being remanded. In fact, they're being released under supervision in the community so that they can get appropriate supports. We have also, Speaker, launched a groundbreaking jail beds program. Ottawa is one of the sites with 20 beds.

MPP Cindy Forster to Minister Flynn Re: Minimum Wage

>>MPP Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Cafeteria staff at the university of Toronto Scarborough campus have been on strike for more than six weeks. They want fairness, better schedules, benefits and wages that they can actually live on. Cafeteria workers at York university were able to win a raise bringing them to \$15 an hour. They achieved this, Mr. Speaker, with no help from the government. Hardworking Ontarians and businesses have waited long enough for change. You have received the submissions for the changing workplaces review. The report is done. Where is it? What is the government willing to do to transform the lives of cafeteria workers and all hardworking Ontario and when.

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: When there's a labour dispute Speaker, the government focuses on both parts. It's a shared responsibility, Speaker. We have some of the best mediators and conciliators in the country right here with the Minister of labour. They have a tremendous record. We actively encourage the employer in this case and the union in this case Speaker to make every effort they possibly can to resolve those issues where they should be resolved Speaker and that's at the bargaining table, Speaker. We're confident if those people bring their best to that table, Speaker, that these parties can reach a settlement that's in the best interest of the institution and the people that work there, Speaker.

>>MPP Forster: Well, I would again say, Speaker to the labour Minister, why are these people still on strike? Do new Democrats believe \$15 should be the minimum Ontarians receive for the hard work they do and shouldn't have to strike to get it. People should be able to plan their lives with better schedules, better wages and without being able to take time off for sick leave without breaking the bank. Speaker, again, what the the government period to do for cafeteria workers and all hardworking Ontarians and when?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, thank you. I don't think this government needs to take any lessons from the third party on how to resolve labour disputes. We have got the change in workplaces under way. We have been doing it for two years, Speaker. The report is almost ready. It's going to reach this House, Speaker. The expansion that's being done of these issues simply has not been done in the province of Ontario before, Speaker. 98% of labour disputes in this province, Speaker are resolved without a strike, without a lockout. When the NDP Were in power, Speaker, when the NDP Were in power, almost a million days a year lost, Speaker. If anybody is going to give anybody lessons on how the Collective bargaining process should work, Speaker, it should not be that party. I look forward to the input from the third party when the changing workplaces review is made public in a very short time. They will have an opportunity to speak out then like they should have when we had the minimum wage debate here.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Albanese Re: Volunteer Service Awards

>>MPP Ann Hoggarth: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of citizenship and immigration. Minister, Ontario depends on the good will of volunteers to deliver vital services and build strong, inclusive communities. In my riding of Barrie, a number of constituents have received recognitions through your ministry for the outstanding work that they do. Mr. Speaker, the function of the honours and awards secretariat is integral to the recognizing Ontarians across the province for contributing their time to local organizations such as the stroke recovery association of Barrie and sifting local initiatives like seasons centre for grieving children, peer to peer support for children grieving the deaths of an immediate family member. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister please tell us more about how the government of Ontario recognizes the outstanding accomplishments and achievements of our volunteers?

>>Minister Laura Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would first of all like to thank the member for Barrie championing volunteers in her community. Each year, more than 12,500 volunteers are celebrated in Ontario through five honours and 12 recognition programs O Minister s by honours and awards secretariat. One of the province's highest honour is the order of Ontario. Last December, 26 individuals were appointed to the order of Ontario by the Honourable Elizabeth dowdeswell, the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. Recipients including outstanding individuals such as sprinter Donovan Bailey and Lisa Laflamme, chief anchor of Canada CTV national news.

>> MPP Hoggarth: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister for her answer. Minister, each year Ontarians benefit from the efforts of approximately 4.9 million volunteers. In my riding of Barrie, a large number of my constituents rely on volunteers to deliver vital services such as providing support to patients recovering from a stroke. Mr. Speaker, I know that in the past, Royal Victoria regional health centre auxiliary of bare with 800 volumes had access to programs through the ministry to acknowledge volunteers for enhancement of patient care. The ministry would agree it is important to recognize and thank these organizations and individuals that represent the best of our province. Speaker, can the Minister inform this House about the programs that recognize the outstanding contributions of volunteers in our communities.

>> Minister Albanese: Mr. Speaker, I again want to thank the member from Barrie. The member is correct. Through our volunteer service awards, both adults and youth are recognized for the length of time that they volunteered for an organization. Last year, 2,200 organizations including the Barrie art club accessed our program. More than 11,000 volunteers were recognized at 54 different ceremonies across the province. Mr. Speaker, this year from March to June, more than 50 ceremonies are being held throughout Ontario in communities to celebrate the contributions of our

volunteers. I have written to every member of this House with a detailed information about the local ceremonies. And I encourage them to get engaged. It is through these programs that we are able to recognize volunteers across O province for their contributions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Martow to Minister Hoskins Re: Brampton Urgent Care Center

>>MPP Gila Martow: Thank you very much. To the Minister of health and long-term care. Mr. Speaker, the area around Brampton hospital has a high concentration of elders. It should focus on senior care, special clinics, outpatient mental health services, medical and walk-in assessment centres. Shockingly and sadly, the urgent care centre of Brampton is scheduled to close this June. Mr. Speaker, how can this government turn its back on these seniors?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins; Well, Mr. Speaker, it was Branson, it wasn't Brampton. I require that qualification. I'm not familiar with this specific situation, Mr. Speaker. But on the one hand I'm happy to talk to the member opposite to get informed to have a closer understanding. I will be doing the same with my staff and the ministry over the course of the day. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, we provide the opportunity for our local communities to -- and our local hospitals and those that govern them to make decisions based on the priorities and the needs of the local community. It's critically important as they make those decisions they are able to provide that confidence and those assurances to the community that those services that they rely on are going to be provided. Again, I am not familiar with this specific situation. Perhaps I will get more information in supplementary. Even better, Mr. Speaker, I suggest a conversation so perhaps we could work together to resolve this in a satisfactory way.

>> Minister Martow; Thank you very much, and I'm happy to discuss it further. I understand that councillor James Pasternak is going to be speaking to Toronto city council about the issue. I thought the Minister would be aware. There are concerns that North York general hospital does not have room to absorb the services presently provided to the community at Branson hospital. Mr. Speaker, the Ontario government promised medical services to be provided specifically to seniors in this area just south of my riding of Thornhill. In addition to seniors, the Branson neighbourhood has a high concentration of new Canadians who value the healthcare provided at the Branson place. Will the Prime Minister promise to look into the matter and ensure that the seniors, new Canadians and the rest of the residents of the Branson area in northern Toronto will not be losing their cherished medical services. Thank you.

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. So as the member notes, this is part of North York general hospital. My understanding from the staff is that the lease on this particular facility for Branson ambulatory is due to expire in 2018. There's a confidence that there will be no service loss expected as a result of these changes.

MPP Mantha to Minister Mauro Re: Ring of Fire Development

>>MPP Michael Mantha: My question is to the premier. This government has played for years to be promising to match in investment to the ring of fire corridor. The feds can't do anything until the province has a road plan, and I quote, as of today, I haven't seen a road plan. It's hard to invest on a blank piece of paper. We need a plan. Well, Speaker, who's right and where's the plan?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, Minister of economic development and mines.

>> Minister Bill Mauro: Appreciate the question from the member. The member is right when he recognizes on this side of the House our government has significantly put a significant allocation on the table regarding to infrastructure buildout in the ring of fire. The number is \$1 billion, Speaker. It's a significant commitment to moving forward with developments in the ring of fire area. And I would mention to the member I remember well in the election of 2014 where the ring of fire was not

mentioned in the NDP Platform that first came out when they were rushing forward to take us to the polls. Speaker, we continue to work on the file in a very significant way. I understand the member may be trying to link this back to the federal budget that came out last week that in his mind not directly referenced investment in the ring of fire. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, we believe at some point there will be an opportunity for the federal government to play a role in the ring of fire development. We are counting on it. We expect to come forward with it.

>>MPP Mantha: Mr. Speaker, when you invest money to develop natural resources in the north, the entire province benefits from this investment. This Liberal government has been talking about the ring of fire for years, but nothing, nothing you have to show for it. When this government -- when is this government going to stop announcing development in the ring and fire and actually start developing the ring of fire?

>> Minister Mauro: Speaker, one of the pieces that has seen some progress, I would reference, is that there was a corridor study completed not that long ago. And while there was not a definitive length or route established through that corridor study, it's my understanding that that work did yield significant information that will position us well as we move forward on this particular file in terms of finally defining a particular route. There is some actions considered and progress further required where they want to see a secondary study completed. It's my understanding that the first study was very informative in terms of what it yielded and as well Speaker will help us as we move forward with providing community access roads to four of five first nations communities that will ultimately be able to tie in to an east-west corridor. Work is ongoing. Progress is being made. We look forward to the work to continue.

MPP Potts to Minister Moridi Re: Clean Tech Sector

>>MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of research, innovation, and science. Mr. Speaker, members know full well how important manufacturing processes are that are less harmful for the environment. Many consumers in Ontario are switching to products that are low carbon. We must support the companies that are investing and innovating these new products. Embracing clean tech has multiple benefits for our society, lessens the damage done to the environment by harmful manufacturing processes and a healthier habitat reduced health related issues as well as new technology will increase the size of the sector, create new companies and jobs adding to our already stellar gdp growth. This sector is important to Ontario's future and all of our children's futures. Will the member of this House let(the government know about his plans?

>> Minister Reza Moridi; Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Speaker from Beaches- East York for that very good question. Mr. Speaker, the member is right on all accounts. Clean tech is a sector in Ontario that is capable of enormous growth, Mr. Speaker. To support that sector, our 2016 budget announced \$55 million investment to establish the clean tech equity fund, funded through our business growth initiative. Mr. Speaker, this investment will help develop emerging companies by ensuring innovative firms have the access to capital they need to scale up higher talents and export globally. I am glad to see the federal government following provincial lead, Mr. Speaker. Announce \$380 million equity in their 2017 budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Potts Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister. The work that he is doing to advance innovation in Ontario is absolutely outstanding. Worthy of a doctorate of physics. Now, the news is fantastic, Speaker, it is more important in Ontario than ever to foster the right investment climate to turn local innovation into scaled up companies and high quality jobs. I know that clean tech north, chaired by Brian Watson, the Beaches- East York constituent appreciates our vision. It's great to see that the government is investing in a business sector that can have a direct impact on Ontarians day to day lives. The growth of this sector will allow people to make more environmentally conscious decisions, decisions that consumers can feel good about. Will the Minister tell the House about the clean tech sector in Ontario and more about what the government is doing to support the sector.

>>Minister Moridi; Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Beaches- East York for

that question. Once again, Mr. Speaker, the member is correct. Ontario is home to the largest and the fastest growing clean tech sector in our country, Canada. Ontario's clean tech sector, Mr. Speaker, is responsible for \$8 billion in revenue and employs over 64,000 people in 3,000 companies across our province. Clean tech in Ontario is a sector of great strategic importance. It has the capacity to generate revenue and to help mitigate environmental damages. Mr. Speaker, Ontario's highly skilled workforce, vi Brant innovation and tech classes and geographic position gives us a great competitive edge over our other jurisdictions. Mr. Speaker, we will continue to invest in our clean tech sector as one of the leaders in our innovative economy. Thank you.

MPP Oosterhoff to Minister Hunter Re: School Closures

>>MPP Sam Oosterhoff: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of education. Tonight, the niagara district school will be voting on whether or not to close down schools. Closing these schools would leave enormous holes in the communities of Lincoln, grimsby and west Lincoln. But there's still time to do the right thing and listen to the parents, teachers and children in niagara. My question to the Minister of education is this, will her ministry put a moratorium on the closure in rural schools across Ontario until the accomodation review is fixed and the funding formula is amended.

>>Minister Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for this question. Mr. Speaker, as I have said in this House as recently as yesterday, an arbitrary moratorium is not the approach, Mr. Speaker. There is no one size fits all solution when it comes to our local schools. And, Mr. Speaker, we believe in our locally elected school boards because, Mr. Speaker, they understand the needs in their local communities. We put in place an accomodation review process that requires school boards to consult with the school community, Mr. Speaker. And that includes with their local municipalities, coterminus boards, with students, with parents so that they get these locally made decisions right. Mr. Speaker, this is about ensuring that the locally elected school boards do what is in the best interests of their local schools.

>> MPP Oosterhoff: Speaker, my question is back to the Minister of education. Perhaps the Minister won't listen to the constituents in my riding. Perhaps she will listen to the parents and students in the rest of Ontario. Small and rural schools are the back bones of local communities and economies. Students and parents across the province are rightly anxious about the radical ongoing closures. This Liberal government seems to be doing everything it can to balance their books on the backs of rural schools and their students. So my question is back to the Minister of education, when will this government stop trying to balance the budget on the backs of rural students?

>> Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, we know that schools play a vital role in the social fabric that ties our great communities together. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the member opposite that we are continuing to invest in our schools and our local schools are really the centre of our communities. We have increased the funding to schools by 59% since 2003, Mr. Speaker. I want to also point out in the member's own riding, we have invested in 12 new and improved schools since 2003. So let me bring to the member's attention that \$8.9 million was spent to build the new 20 valley public school. \$11.3 million to build a new binsbrook school and childcare spaces. Mr. Speaker, I can go on with a list of 12 new schools in that member's own riding. We have been investing in public education here.

MPP Sattler to Minister Jaczek (Hoskins) Re: Long-Term Care Spaces

>>MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Last week in London, I met with four families of adults live with severe physical disability in dire need of residential care after suffering stroke or traumatic brain injury. Two of these men are living in hospital, one is living in a retirement home and one is living at home with his ageing and unwell mother with long-term care his next and only option. Speaker, these families are desperate and exhausted. They have written to the Minister of health. They have written to the Deputy Premier. They have met with the southwest Lin and with the patient Ombudsman. The wait lists for assisted living are so long, they're loved ones

are more likely to die than to make it to the top of the list. What does the Premier want me to tell these families?

>>Minister Helena Jaczek: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And the types of cases that the member opposite is describing are some of the most challenging. I think we can acknowledge this. There are complex medical issues in a number of these case, mental health overlay, dual diagnosis and so on. And for the safety of all concerned on some occasions, individuals do need the type of support that they will receive in the long-term care facility or other types of environment. We know that sometimes there are ageing parents involved in these situations. And we know that they need the kind of support that is appropriate for their loved one. In terms of talking about these specific cases, obviously I cannot do that. But we are certainly aware that we need more supports in appropriate settings. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>>Minister Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. In the London area there are 500 adults on the waiting list for which he isshire homes, 50 on the Dale Britain injury waiting list for House supports and as many as 90 on the waiting list at participation House. They are waiting for Lin funded dollars to support their medical needs. The lack of assisted living options is creating a crisis for families. This is forcing the permanent hospitalization of people who want to live in their communities. It is trapping people who are in the prime of their lives inappropriately in nursing homes. Will the Premier commit today to increasing the number of assisted living placements in the southwest Lin so that these adults and others like them with complex medical needs can live with dignity in the kind of housing they deserve?

>>Minister Eric Hoskins: These individual cases remind of just how important it is that we harness all the resources possible to provide them with the respect and dignity and the supports that are required to live as full and independent and beneficial lives to themselves and being part of their communities. So we know that there's more work to be done. There has -- I think the member opposite would acknowledge and referenced two organizations as well, participation House a cessshire home. I will take these examples and I know that there is a role for Lins as well to make a difference in specific cases.

MPP Vernile to Minister Jaczek Re: Financial Literacy Training

>> MPP Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of community and social services. For many people living on low incomes, learning financial literacy skills is a very important step in becoming more secure and independent. Organizations like the working centre in my riding of Kitchener Centre are playing a crucial role in teaching financial education and they're providing support services for some of Ontario's most vulnerable people. I joined the Minister recently in my riding as she announced a further four years of funding to organizations like the working centre through the financial empowerment and problem solving program. Speaker. Could the Minister please give us an update on how this investment is helping build financial literacy among low income Ontarians.

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member of Kirch centre for her question. My ministry and this government know for many people living on low incomes, financial literacy is an important step in becoming more financially secure. And that is why last year, our government made an initial investment of \$1.5 million in prosper Canada and why I recently announced an additional \$8 million over the next five years to continue providing programs that promote financial literacy. Our investment will make it possible for agencies to continue the already successful financial empowerment and problem solving program. Speaker, this program has already assisted almost 16,000 individuals in just two years. Individuals have benefitted from services such as tax clinics that help people prepare and maximize their tax return, thereby increasing access to tax benefits for low income individuals. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.