

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Monday, April 23, 2018

From: "Stinson, Jeffrey (CAB)" <jeffrey.stinson@ontario.ca>
To: "@CAB-ProvLegQP" <provlegqp@msgov.gov.on.ca>
Date: Mon, 23 Apr 2018 11:53:56 -0400
Attachments: 20180423 - Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript.doc (127.49 kB)

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 3rd Session
Monday, April 23, 2018

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

Table of Contents

MPP Fedeli to Minister Thibeault (McMahon)
Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault
Re: Hydro One Exec Salary

MPP Fife to Minister Jaczek
Re: Hospital Funding

MPP French to Minister Jaczek
Re: Universal Pharmacare

MPP Wilson to Minister Thibeault
Re: Hydro One Exec Salary

MPP Natyshak to Minister Flynn
Re: Collective Bargaining Rights

MPP McMeekin to Minister Flynn
Re: Minimum Wage Increase

MPP Clark to Minister Naqvi
Re: 2018 Budget

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault
Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Matthews to Minister Naqvi
Re: Community Justice Centres

MPP Coe to Minister Hunter
Re: York University Strike

MPP Bisson to Minister Jaczek
Re: Hospital Funding

MPP Martins to Minister Naidoo Harris
Re: Student Achievement Support

MPP Fedeli to Minister Jaczek
Re: Mental Health and Addiction Services

MPP Forster to Minister Jaczek
Re: Long-Term Care Spaces

MPP Qaadri to Minister Ballard
Re: Climate Change

MPP Fedeli to Minister Thibeault (McMahon) Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Good morning again, Speaker. My question is for the acting Premier. The financial accountability office was very concerned about the Liberal hydro financing scheme and asked m.p.s to make certain the auditor general approved, but not only did the auditor say the scheme does not meet accounting standards. She said that to flow the costs through Ontario power generation, as the scheme called for, will add \$4 billion. She said, quote -- we're talking \$4 billion more than needed just to get an accounting result. Now the "Globe and mail" is taking this scandal national with a damning indictment of this government practices. Mr. Speaker, now that the Liberal scheme has been disclosed, would the government follow the law and save the Ontario taxpayers \$4 billion?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleased to rise and once again talk about the policy choice that we made as a government, Mr. Speaker, to ensure we continue to have a reliable electricity system, a clean electricity system, Mr. Speaker, and an affordable electricity system for the ratepayers of today and for the ratepayers of tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. The fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, the plan that we brought forward keeps the cost of borrowing within the ratase, not the tax base, Mr. Speaker, because that's the logical thing to do, Mr. Speaker. The policies and the implementation process for the fair hydro plan were designed and extensi reviewed by senior bureaucrat officials, Mr. Speaker, from the ministry of energy, from the ministry of finance, from the treasury board secretariat, from the office was provincial controller, from Cabinet office. From the Ontario financial authority, from the ieso, Mr. Speaker, from the Ontario power generation nd we worked with third P experts with firms such as K.M.F. -- KPMG --

>> MPP Fedeli: Back to the acting Premier. The logical thing to do is not spend the extra \$4 billion. The "Globe and mail" clearly illustrates that not only will Ontario families pay tens of billions of dollars for this Liberal hydro scheme, but the secret accounting will cost taxpayers \$4 billion more. The article reads, quote -- Andre Lau the C.D. Howe research director said he'd never before encountered such a convoluted arrangement in the public sphere. To him the use of related party transactions between multiple entitys resembles tax avoidance schemes in the private sector. Quote, the same accountants that are advising the government are advising the private sector to build other types of complex accounting structures, he told "The globe". How crazy is this? Really. Mr. Speaker, will the government come clean on he "Globe and mail" has titled, quote, bad books?

>> Minister Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the members opposite are anxious to hear the answer. That's why they asked the question. Speaker, our government presents the government's finances fairly and accurately and accordance with Canadian public sector accounting standards. The plan will be transparent in the consolidated financial statements of our province. Speaker the technical issue about whether or not the ieso is a rate-regulated agency and should thus use rate regulated accounting much the auditor general does not believe the ieso should and we respectfully disagree, Speaker. Instead the A.G. Is advocating for an accounting practice that steals \$17 billion in market contributions over which the ieso has oversight and those are now transparent, Speaker, and in the public domain. In closing, Speaker, I know the member opposite mentioned the public. They are waiting as are we, Speaker, with bated breath to see what the other side is going to do about hydro, Speaker. We've yet to hear. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Fedeli: Well, back to the Deputy Premier. It's transparent all right. We saw right through it. In a statement to "The globe", KPMG emphasized it had no formal role in selecting or approving Ontario's aounting policy nor did deloitte. Ernst and young declined to answer questions about its

work according to the "Globe and mail." Yet the energy Minister keeps saying all of them have approved this government's se. All of the firms deny that. Mr. Speaker, do we need another gas plant-style scandal hearing to get to the truth yet again?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'm pleased to rise and talk about the work that we have done with our accounting firms, Mr. Speaker, and the policies and the implementation process for the fair hydro plan were designed and extensively reviewed as I said before, Mr. Speaker, by Ian wide, KPMG and deloitte. In conjunction with that, Mr. Speaker, we worked extensively with the senior bureaucratic officials, Mr. Speaker, within my ministry, within the ministry of finance, within the treasury board secretariat, the office of provincial controller, Cabinet office, Mr. Speaker, as well as the Ontario financial authorities and the independent electricity system operator and of course, Mr. Speaker, O.P.G.. Through this work, we cred a range of implementation options and ensured that due diligence, Mr. Speaker, was complete. Once again these are policy choices we made to ensure we continued to have a clean, reliable and affordable electricity system.

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro One Exec Salary

>> MPP Todd Smith: Speaker, my question this morning is for the Minister of energy. If the \$4 billion wasted on the Liberals' unfair hydro plan isn't outrageous enough, Ontarians were shocked last week to learn that the Hydro One board secretly unserted a poisoned pill into the contract of the Hydro One C.E.O., that would a him to cash in \$10 million in severance on the way out the door should Ed be fired. Mr. Speaker, was the Minister of energy aware of this \$10 million --

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that executive salaries are high compared to the vast majority of Ontario salaries and remain committed to Hydro One's regulation accountability, Mr. Speaker, and transparency -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Accountability and transparency through our government's involvement as a majority shareholder. That said, Mr. Speaker, Doug Ford knows very well that Hydro One is now a publicly traded company, not a government entity, and his rhetoric won't take one cent, not one cent off electricity bills. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hydro One's governance agreement is publicly available and we urge T Conservatives and Doug Ford to read it. Its purpose is to ensure that the structure of Hydro One benefits ratepayers and has allowed them to find \$114 million in savings, translating to lower electricity rates and winter disconnections, enhanced customer service, Speaker, and I'll get more in supplementary.

>> MPP Smith: Mr. Speaker, it was the Liberal government who sold Hydro One, more than 80% of taxpayers said that it was the wrong thing to do for the future of the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, it was the Premier W sai time and time again -- Mr. Speaker, it was the Premier who said time and time again in this House that the government retained the right to fire the board and the C.E.O. At Hydro One. Yes, thisccurred behind closed doors, a \$10 million severance package for the \$6 million man should he be fired. My question to the Minister of energy. Did he even know about this secret arrangement at the board?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we do know about is the 25% savings that we brought to all -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 25% savings that we brought to all residents and families right across this province, Mr. Speaker. Again we recognize that executive salarys are high compared to the vast majority of Ontario sales, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to remain committed to Hydro One's regulation and accountability and transparency through our government's involvement as that majority shareholder, Mr. Speaker. But, you know, Mr. Speaker, we continue to be perplexed by Doug Ford's out-of-control and erratic scheme to fire the leadership of company because he hasn't said what his goal is, Mr. Speaker, and how he will leave tis -- how this will leave the people of Ontario better off, Mr. Speaker. We know that the rates are set independently by the rio energy board, not the C.E.O. Of Hydro One, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to work in the best interests of the people of Ontario.

>> MPP Smith: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how the Minister of energy does it. Every day during

question period, he goes 'round and 'round and 'round and 'round like a broken record. But where was he when the people of Ontario were getting hit with \$4 million more than they should have on the Liberals' unfair hydro plan and here was he when this secret deal was being cooked up by the board at Hydro One to hand out a \$10 million severance package to the \$6 million man, the C.E.O. And president of Hydro One. Where was he? He can spin like a broken record in the House, but does he believe it was the right thing to do to put a secret deal together for \$10 million –

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've been standing here right in this House, helping the people of Ontario as they vote against every single thing that we do to bring forward an affordable electricity system, Mr. Speaker. Making sure that we eliminate coal. They vote against that, Mr. Speaker. Bringing in a 25% reduction for families, they vote against it, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again when we brought forward minimum wage to help families and help individuals across this province, Mr. Speaker, they actually voted against it. We know where we stand when it comes to the people of Ontario. We stand shoulder to shoulder with them, Mr. Speaker. They vote against everything they can to make sure that it makes life more difficult for the people of this province. We will continue to work, Mr. Speaker, for the people of Ontario. You know what, Mr. Speaker? When it comes to making sure that the electricity system is clean, reliable and affordable, Mr. Speaker, it is this government that brought forward the fair hydro plan that has actually helped the people of Ontario. We'll continue to do what's right for the people of this province, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Fife to Minister Jaczek Re: Hospital Funding

>> MPP Catherine Fife: Thank you. My question is to the acting Premier. After 15 years of underfunding hospitals, including five years of frozen operating budgets for hospitals, does the Premier realize, does this government realize that you have created a crisis in health care in the province of Ontario?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, our budget this year has laid out clearly what we intend to do, and that is continue to invest in hospital funding, as we have each and every year since we took office. And in this particular budget we're making a historic investment of an additional \$822 million in Ontario's publicly funded hospitals. This amounts to an increase overall, on average, of 4.6% and this will increase capacity, decrease wait times and improve access to care for families across Ontario. So we are directly benefitting people living in Ontario, increasing their access -- To our hospitals.

>> MPP Fife: Thank you very much. Again to the acting Premier or the Minister. The Premier's budget was more about trying to get headlines than trying to fix the problems that this Liberal government has created. The C.E.O. of Muskoka Algouquin health care said and I quote -- hospital funding has not kept pace with many new and rising costs like hydro. The budget is very disappointing and does not address the multimillion-dollar operating shortfall that we are projecting. Why doesn't this government get it, Mr. Speaker?

>> Minister Jaczek: Well, I'm certainly pleased to give some specifics as to what our budget actually will mean for the people of Ontario. It will give patients access to 26,000 additional M.R.I. Operating hours, 14,000 more surgical and medical procedures, 3,000 more cardiac procedures, and it will give patients access to more essential services in hospitals like cardiac care, critical care, chemotherapy and treatment for stroke. It will decrease wait times for hip, knee, cataract, shoulder, cornea and spine surgery. We're increasing our investment each and every year. We're doing it in a careful, thoughtful way, depending on the demographics of a particular region. We're looking at that with the lens of increasing our investments.

>> MPP Fife: In order to address the problem you actually have to admit that there's a problem. 15 years of Liberal decisions have created a crisis in our health care system. It's in all of our ridings. You cannot hide from it. But instead of fixing hospitals, Doug Ford would further privatize health care or just close hospitals or health programs. The Liberals gave the people of this province a hallway

medicine. Doug Ford is going to give the people of this province parking lot medicine. The good news -- the good news is that we new Democrats have a plan to fix hospitals and end hallway medicine. But it is important to accept responsibility for what you have created in this province. Will this Premier accept responsibility and apologize to the people of this province for creating a crisis in health care in the province of Ontario?

>> Minister Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, hospital funding in Ontario has increased by more than 65% since we took office in 2003. It now is at \$19 billion. In the past two years alone we've increased operational funding to hospitals by almost \$1 billion. And also last year, we committed an additional \$9 billion to support hospital infrastructure as part of our plan to invest \$19 billion in capital grants for hospitals over the next ten years to keep our system sustainable for years to come. Health care is a very complex issue, Mr. Speaker. We are doing our part when it comes to hospital funding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP French to Minister Jaczek Re: Universal Pharmacare

>> MPP Jennifer French: Thank you very much, Speaker. And my question's to the Premier. New Democrats have a pharmacare plan for everyone. It will cover 90% of prescriptions and no one is left behind. It is actually pharmacare for everyone. Why doesn't the Premier believe in universal pharmacare?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, certainly our government is committed at the end of the day, hopefully, to have a national universal pharmacare program. We on this side of the House, being the type of responsibility government that we are, are moving incrementally towards that goal. And so of course we did announce our ohip plus program that started on January 1st of this year. Free drugs for everyone under the age of 25. The entire number of drugs is 4,400 drugs that are now covered. We believe this is an excellent step forward. Over a million prescriptions have already been filled, Mr. Speaker. This is the first step and of course I'll elaborate in the supplementary.

>> MPP French: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the premier. I don't think incrementally is going to cut it. The Premier and the government have talked about pharmacare but the reality is the government has had 15 years to act. Why has this Liberal government ignored pharmacare for the last 15 years?

>> Minister Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, as I'm saying of course we do believe in incremental improvement as a responsible way in terms of building our budget. And so of course we have now increased our coverage in ohip plus for all seniors over the age of 65. No co-pay. There will be no deductible. This will be of immense benefit, again covering all 4,400 drugs, to ensure that no one is left behind. So we have a comprehensive plan. It's going to make a real difference to the health of the community. I do want to point out that the NDP's plan apparently won't take place. It won't be realized until the year 2020. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP French: Thank you very much, Speaker. It surprises me that this government defends their junior drug plan and senior drug plan. Call it -- base they don't care about anyone in between. The Premier thinks children should have access to medication. Cut off when they turn 25. New Democrats don't think so. We don't ask how old you are when you go to the hospital so we shouldn't care how old you are when you need a prescription. Universal for a person with diabetes or asthma or H.I.V. Or any other chronic illness. They should have drug coverage. They should have coverage on their 25th birthday, their 30th birthday, their 40th, their 50th and it goes on. Everybody, Speaker. Everybody. That is what universal means. So why doesn't the Premier believe in universal pharmacare?

>> Minister Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you will recall in our budget of this year, we took a further step. We introduced coverage for those with no private insurance between the age of 25 and 65 so that they will have 80% of their costs reimbursed for dental and pharmacare of \$400 for individual and \$700 for a family of four. This is an excellent step forward. More and more people are being covered. We have one out of two people in Ontario now covered for pharmacare. Thank you, Mr.

Speaker .

MPP Wilson to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro One Exec Salary

>> MPP Jim Wilson: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to Minister of energy. Yesterday Hydro One's chair released a statement on their egregious \$10 million severance package for their \$6 million man. Did the Premier or Minister instruct Hydro One to release that statement? And did they coordinate the statement with Hydro One? Yes or no, Minister.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the board is an entity that works on its own, Mr. Speaker. And so, you know, they -- I was aware that they were releasing that statement. But when it comes to, you know, Hydro One's governance agreement, Mr. Speaker, as I said that's also publicly available and we urge the Conservatives to read that, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Wilson: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's the fourth question today that the Minister 's been asked what he knew about the \$10 million severance package for the \$6 million man, when he knew it, whether this was a coordinated effort between Hydro One and the government. I can't believe as a former energy Minister that your hydro company wouldn't inform you back in November about such a significant change in the rules of the game over there at hyd one. Minister, last week the Premier walked out, and you ran away from a scrum. So I want to know what you're hiding, why you would walk away from a scrum and why you're not being forthright with the people of Ontario. Withdraw. Withdraw.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I once again was very happy to answer questions to the media and stay there for about 10 minutes, Mr. Speaker. The only person that I know that is doing the Doug and dash, as it's starting to get known within the media circles is the leader of the Conservatives, Mr. Speaker, who makes sure that when he answers one question and then disappears in the bus, Mr. Speaker, or actually makes the announcement that he's going to fire the C.E.O. And then leaves it to the member of Prince Edward- Hastings to answer those questions, Mr. Speaker. So I don't have a problem actually talking about government's record of making sure that we brought forward the fair hydro plan that reduced rates by 25%, Mr. Speaker. And I know that they sneakily snuck that into their. Sneakily snuck, Mr. Speaker. It's a new word. Mr. Speaker, you know they snuck it into the people's guarantee, Mr. Speaker. And then tossed it as You know what, Mr. Speaker ?

MPP Natyshak to Minister Flynn Re: Collective Bargaining Rights

>> MPP Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of labour. Speaker, once again this Liberal government says one thing when it comes to being a friend of working people and then does another. Once again this Liberal government has chosen through omnibus legislation to introduce changes that favour one party to effectively pick a fight and then stand back and watch. In what universe does the Minister of labour believe that it's appropriate and frankly even constitutional for the Minister of the crown to arbitrarily strip unionized workers of their historic Collective bargaining jurisdiction and hand-deliver that jurisdiction to another union?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for that very unbiased question. Speaker, in the I.C.I. Sector, Speaker, there's been a long-standing dispute between the parties. What we did, Speaker, we went out and we got one of the -- Speaker, we went out. We got one of the preeminent experts, Speaker, Kevin Burkett, world renowned internationally famous. Somebody in the province of Ontario that people rely on to bring neutrality and fairness. He studied the current circumstances around the I.C.I. Form wood sector in the province and he made recommendations as to how we could move forward, Speaker. We took that advice and then we took it out again to Mike Mitchell, Speaker, an expert in construction law. Asked for specific recommendations, Speaker. And that's what's before the House as I speak.

>> MPP Natyshak: Speaker, the Minister of labour, the Premier and the Minister of economic development have concocted this plan in schedule 14 of the budget bill, to strip the historic jurisdiction from thousands of liuna members in the concrete forming sector of our construction industry. If you listen closely you can hear 10,000 of them right now on the front lawn ready to fighthis legislation. Speaker, not only will this cause immediate labour shortages but it jeopardizes the economic welfare of the pension security of retirees and the health and safety of workers in this sector. It will also impede the productivity of a sector that has literally built the communities in this province. Speaker, will the Minister reverse this draconian legislation and create a level playing field for all work NERs this industry, remove the dangerous precedent-setting clause that the Liberal government brought in through their T legislation?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, as we spent the last couple years going through this process, Speaker, it's been a long-standing dispute. We've tried to remain as neutral as we possibly can, Speaker. The Honourable member certainly has taken a side on this, Speaker. It's clear what side he's coming from, to the detriment of all the carpenters that have worked along with us as well, Speaker. So very clearly I can see that there's one side being represented here. Our job is to represent both sides, Speaker. That's why we brought in the arbitrators, why we brought in the experts, Speaker. -- Speaker, their recommendations is tevel E playing field and ensure that we have continued fairness in the province of Ontario. Northern, eastern Ontario, no change, Speaker. Southwestern Ontario, no change affecting the labour's Collective agreement. In an expanded G.T.A., Speaker, we're enforcing -

MPP McMeekin to Minister Flynn Re: Minimum Wage Increase

>> MPP Ted McMeekin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's also for the Minister of labour. Spring has seemingly finally arrived and it's now time for students around the province to look for summer jobs. In my area, the folks at the goodwill career centre work hard each year to help students find jobs across the city. Last year they placed over 300 students in the summer jobs and this year the demand has increased. The goodwill career centre's message is, if you're between 15 and 29 and you're looking for employment, we can help. I believe that many of these jobs pay minimum wage, which is now much higher than it was last summer. It I so encouraging that despite what we have heard from critics, students in my riding are benefitting from a thriving summer job market and increased minimum wage. Minister, can you please tell us more about what we can expect to see around the province as the result of the increase in minimum wage?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you to the member from Dundas. We all know the previous Conservative government froze theimume \$6.85, Speaker, for nearly ten years when they were in charge, Speaker. As a result people in this province who were working sometimes 35, 40 hours a week, sometimes two or three jobs just to get by, Speaker, could not get by. We knew we had to do better. That's why we raised the minimum wage 12 times, Speaker, since 2003. Now more than double that it was when it was frozen for all those years under the previous government. But we know at the same time the economy of the province of Ontario has grown. Our province is leading the g-7 when it comes to economic growth. Unemployment numbers as low as we've seen in years, Speaker. 820,000 new jobs, Speaker. Thanks to the minpimum wage, Speaker, more Ontarians are able to benefit from that growth. That's something we should be proud of, Speaker .

>> MPP McMeekin: I'm seeing that firsthand in my community. While we have businesses expanding and creating wealth, not everyone was seeing the benefits of the growth. There were parents whoe working full time and finding it difficult to provide the essentials to their family, let alone save to get ahead in the future. The increase to a \$15 minimum wage means that they can more easily take care of themselves and their families. I found it disappointing when our Colleagues in the opposition voted against increasing the minimum wage. Even more so when their leader promised he would roll it back. The simple fact is that these families cannot afford a rollback of the \$15 minimum wage. They cannot afford the leader of the opposition's plan to take money out of their pockets. Minister, can you detail how our plan is different?

>> Minister Flynn: Thank you again to the member for this very important question for PM People who need help a lot. Our plan is simple. What we're going to do is raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour January 1st of next year. That is different, Speaker, from the leader of the opposition. He promises to roll that back, Speaker, and to take that money directly out of the wallets of working people, Speaker, this is money they rely on to put food on the table, keep a roof over their heads. It's lunch money, Speaker. It's money for shoes for the kids' feet. These are the families that need our help, Speaker. These are the people that rely on this, and at the same time economist versus already settled that an increase to \$15 an hour minimum wage means more money for workers after taxes. Nothing the leader of the opposition can say by taking that money away from these people changes that fact. We know it's time to test into things that are going to help families. While they focus on making the rich richer, Speaker, we're focusing on -- Minimum wage and oh plus.

MPP Clark to Minister Naqvi Re: 2018 Budget

>> MPP Steve Clark: My question's to the acting Premier. The Liberals have held a total of 39 campaign style announcements. An estimated cost of \$7,500 each event. That brings the total amount spent campaigning on the taxpayers' dime by the Liberals to \$292,500. The Liberals are now under investigation by Elections Ontario. These events have to stop. Mr. Speaker, would the Liberal party pay back the taxpayer?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate that question from the member opposite. I think the member opposite has been exaggerating what Elections Ontario have said in terms of their St O Response they gave when they receive complaints like the one they have received from the Conservatives. Speaker, and, Speaker, our focus is to make sure that we are talking about this very important budget, this budget that actually provides for a plan to care and opportunity for the people of Ontario, a budget that ensures that the people of Ontario get an increase in the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by January 1st, 2019, that ensures that pharmacare is expanded toward seniors 65 and more. No mention, Speaker, investment in building new hospitals, making wait times down. The reason because the member opposite and the Conservatives don't want to talk about that is because they're going to cut all those important services that are so deserving for the people of Ontario.

>> MPP Clark: Back to the acting Premier. Speaker, this government is so desperate to cling to power, they'll stoop to never-before-seen lows. There's no amount of taxpayers' dollars that they won't use for their own self-serving needs. Speaker, how much more taxpayer dollars will this government spend campaigning?

>> Minister Naqvi: Speaker, clearly the Conservatives, you know, had a busy weekend and they're trying to do everything in their power to deflect from the scandals that continue to emerge from their own parties. Speaker, it's questions that people are asking about them, like is the certain nomination of 11 Conservatives candidates entirely by passing the democratic nomination process? Is it, Speaker, they're ashamed about commitment to removing all safe injection sites if elected? Sites that have saved lives of those suffering from mental health and addiction issues? Is it, Speaker, commitment to undo police oversight in our province that was recently passed in this House, oversights -- Or is it, Speaker, the nomination of somebody like Tanya Granic Allen. Part of their party, who is known to take anti-muslim stand, who's known to take antiwoman stand, Mr. Speaker. That's what --

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the acting Premier. Over the weekend an investigation by the "Globe and Mail" confirms what the NDP has been saying for the past year. The Premier is wasting \$4 billion on a complicated private financing scheme whose sole purpose is to conceal the fact that she's using debt to artificially lower hydro bills prior to the election. After the election, hydro bills will skyrocket yet again. Rising by more than 70% over the next

ten years. Ontario families and businesses will be forced to pay back the billions in hydro debt plus another \$21 billion in interest. Why is the Premier spending billions of dollars to mislead Ontarians into believing she's lowering -- Withdraw, Speaker. Why is the Premier spending billions every dollars -- When, over the long run, she's actually driving hydro bills up even higher?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, we reiterate the fact that we made a policy choice, Mr. Speaker. This government made a policy choice to ensure that we continue to have clean, reliable and affordable electricity, Mr. Speaker, for ratepayers of today and for ratepayers of tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. And the fair hydro plan is the cost of borrowing, Mr. Speaker, within the rate base, Mr. Speaker, not the tax base. And we did that, Mr. Speaker, because that's the logical thing to do, Mr. Speaker. That's how it's been done for decades, Mr. Speaker. Electricity financing should remain within the electricity system, Mr. Speaker. And so we worked with the -- you know, within my ministry with officials within the ministry of finance, within the treasury board secretariat, the office of the provincial controller, Cabinet office, Mr. Speaker and of course three outside audit experts, Mr. Speaker. To make sure that the range every implementation were available and our due diligence was completed, Mr. Speaker, and I'll answer more in the supplementary.

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the acting Premier. The Premier's \$40 billion hydro borrowing scheme will not only drive up hydro bills over the long run. It actually violates public sector accounting standards. Emails obtained by the Toronto Globe and Mail prove that government officials knew this from the start when they were designing this scheme. The Premier knew that her private financing scheme would break the rules. But she chose to go ahead anyway, and needlessly waste an extra \$4 billion. Why is the Premier breaking the rules, wasting billions of dollars and destroying public trust in government just so she can win an election?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So let me be clear and let's talk about what two world-class accounting firms had to say in statements about rate regulating accounting within the public sector accounting standards, Mr. Speaker. KPMG said -- on the basis of our extensive research, deliberations and the opinion from another major accounting firm, we believe that the accounting policies adopted by the independent electricity system operator are in accordance with the Canadian public sector accounting standards, Mr. Speaker. Deloitte conclude that any regulatory assets and liabilities recognized through the appropriate application of these policies would meet the criteria for recognition under the Canadian public sector accounting standards, Mr. Speaker, and additionally Ernst & Young is the public's financial editor and is consulted on an ongoing basis, Mr. Speaker. When talking about wasting billions of dollars -- Their plan, Mr. Speaker, is to buy back millions of shares in Hydro One and it will not take one cent off electricity bills for Ontario families. They voted against the fair hydro plan. We reduced rates by 25%, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Matthews to Minister Naqvi Re: Community Justice Centres

>> MPP Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Attorney General. Speaker, we've known for a long time about the overrepresentation of indigenous people, racialized people and marginalized people in our justice system, Speaker. This is a big concern for myself, for our Colleagues, and I know for the Attorney General. The current system seems to exclusively look at criminal behaviour and not -- contributing factors such as homelessness, poverty, mental health or addiction issues, Speaker. There is very simply a lack of holistic approach. So I think we need to ask ourselves how can we start taking a person-centered approach, help address some of the underlying factors that may be causing people to engage in criminal behaviour? I know in the recent budget we announced a new project called community justice sense centres. And I'd like to ask the Attorney General, please, to explain how they will lead to a more holistic approach.

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. I thank the member for this important question. Speaker, we are moving forward with creating community centres to provide a new and innovative that increases access to justice services while reducing barriers faced by vulnerable people, especially people suffering from mental health or addiction issues. Community justice centres move just this

into a community setting to help connect individuals to its critical services that address the root causes of crime before, during and after entry into the justice system. These centres are hubs that bring together services, justice, health, mental health and addictions, housing, social services, tailored to the unique needs of individual communities. Community justice centres will strive to ensure each point of contact with the police or justice system can be an opportunity to provide meaningful intervention. THA reduces the likelihood of further offending or victimization. Part of Ontario's commitment to work together to provide efficient and effective services to communities.

>> MPP Matthews: Speaker, thank you to the Attorney General for his answer but also for making this a priority. Speaker, I'm very optimistic. We've seen C.J.C.S, community justice centres established in over 70 different communities around the world and there's very strong evidence that it reduces recidivism, reduces reliance on in-custody care and enhances community safety and well-being. It is especially important for me because, as the member for London North Centre, one of the three pilots will be located in my community. Speaker, in London, one third of charges laid in the city are committed by youth between the ages of 18 and 25. I'm very pleased to hear that each location will have community-specific models that will be set up to be best equipped to deal with the community they are located in. Please, Attorney General. Can you tell us how the three different community justice centres will reflect the communities they are placed in?

>> Minister Naqvi: Extensive consultation our government has identified three community justice centre models in Kenora, London and Toronto's Moss Park. In Kenora, Speaker, Ontario's planning to establish a bicultural community justice centre that has pair little criminal and restorative processes. These two streams would support increased indigenous leadership in the provision of traditional and restorative justice practices. In Moss Park, urban community health and justice centre that focuses on improving the social determinant of health that can lead to contact with the criminal justice system. Especially, Speaker, in London youth in transition justice hub will connect transition-age young adults with critical support at an early age and provided targeted interventions. Speaker overall this is a \$14 million. Speaker, I truly worry about if the Conservatives under Doug Ford were to be elected, would they promise billions projects like these may be on the chopping block.

MPP Coe to Minister Hunter Re: York University Strike

>> MPP Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of advanced education and skills development. The York university strike has now gone on for nearly two months, impacting more than 51,000 students, Speaker. A letter from the vice-president academic posted recently to the university's website said this -- if the strike does not end in time for winter term classes to resume by April 30th at the latest, there will not be sufficient time to offer all of our summer terms. Speaker, will the Minister finally take action to get the 51,000 students back into their classrooms?

>> Minister Mitzi Hunter: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for the question. This is obviously a very serious situation as it affects and impacts students. I would like to remind the member opposite that York is still open and students are still attending classes, as they have been through the duration. That being said, Mr. Speaker, this government has taken action. The Minister of labour has appointed an experienced mediator to bring the sides together to talk to each party and to find a path to resolution, Mr. Speaker. So we are working on this issue and supporting both parties, because the best deal is a deal that is made at the table. We have been urging both sides to come to the table to resolve their issues. And to find the compromise that is necessary in the best interests of the students of York university, Mr. Speaker. We've been taking this as a very serious issue and have been working towards supporting both parties to come to a resolution. And we will continue to do so, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Coe: Back to the Minister, Speaker. Speaker, this could be the last opportunity the Liberal government has to act. To save the semester of tens every thousands of students and allow them to graduate in June. Classes are on the verge every be cancelled, Speaker. Many students' summer job placements are at risk. Aker, why does the Minister continue to put thousands of students' lives on hold?

>> Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to inform the House, because the member opposite is not providing specific and correct information, Mr. Speaker. York university has in fact put plans in place. They have been doing so for quite some time, starting first and foremost with keeping the university open so that students can attend classes,. Speaker. Just last week the announced additional supports so students can either have an assessment on their term or that, if they have experienced hardship, that they can come to the university and receive the necessary support. Mr. Speaker, our concern first and foremost is for the students at York university. We are urging both sides that are involved in this to come back to the table, to get a deal that recognizes. That both sides will have to compromise, in order to reach a deal and put the needs of the students first and foremost, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Bisson to Minister Jaczek Re: Hospital Funding

>> MPP Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of health. Minister, you will know there are 20 hospitals in this province that are considered medium sized hospitals. Timmins and district hospital is one of those hospitals. When they heard the funding announcement that was made by your government that supposedly hospitals were going to get 4.6% as an increase they thought, well, this is going to go a long ways to helping us. The problem is those 20 medium sized hospitals, because of your health system funding reform, the formula works out such that in Timmins and district hospital doesn't get the full amount. It gets .9%. So as a result our hospital's looking at a deficit next year of close to \$5 million, which is going to be catastrophic when it comes to service delivery. Minister, can you tell us what your plan is to address the shortfall in funding these 20 medium sized hospitals across the province including the Timmins and district hospital?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We made it very clear that when we talked about a 4.6 overall increase, we meant an average increase. There are many areas of this province with very high growth and tremendous population increases. And so this increase of 4.6 is an average. Obviously the smaller hospitals have not received necessarily that amount of an increase. The funding formula is being reviewed and has been reviewed in a manner to increase fairness and equity in terms of the number of patients served, the acuity of the cases. This is done in conjunction with our plans, in conjunction with the Ontario hospital association as well. In fact the president of that association co-chairs our funding review committee that is made up of representatives, including those from medium sized hospitals. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Bisson: Madame Minister, these are medium size hospitals. These are not the small ones. I'm not going to take issue with that. The point is that these hospitals are trying to provide services in an atmosphere where they've cut to the bone already. Timmins and district as you well know has done everything including privatizing their sleep lab in order to save about \$60,000 in an already \$66 million budget. So these hospitals have done everything that they can in order to trim out any kind of excess they don't need and we're seeing it when it comes to patient service. You know, as well as I do, that in the system when you look at hospital funding, the deficit that is incurred by these 20 hospitals about 400 million, there's a surplus of about 400 million with all of the other hospitals that they get in surpluses. This is a question of shifting the dollars around to make sure that the money is evenly distributed. To hospitals like T.D.H. Don't end up with a deficit and are treated like every other hospital in this province so they can provide the services people need.

>> Minister Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the great efforts of many hospitals in terms of finding efficiencies. Actually just at this point I would like to give a shout-out to some of our amazing health care workers. My husband works at southlake regional -- my husband was at southlake regional for six days last week. I can only say our nurses, our doctors, everybody, the food lady, everybody just showed amazing care. And I was so impressed by our wonderful health care workers. I just wanted to -- very important caring group of people. In terms of continuing to work with the funding formula, the member obviously has brought forward an issue that is of importance to the medium sized hospitals. We certainly are committed. To continuing to work to ensure that the appropriate funding is there. It is certainly our commitment that we provide adequate funding for people to receive the type of care they need where they need it. Thank you.

MPP Martins to Minister Naidoo Harris Re: Student Achievement Support

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Speaker. My question this morning is to the Minister of education. After inheriting an education system that was underfunded and in disrepair, a fact that was affirmed by the elementary teachers I met with in my office last week, our government has made it our top priority to invest in teachers, education workers and students and our publicly funded education system. The focus is to support the people of Ontario, including all students and thousands of staff who support student success. Speaker, Ontario is an international leader in education. We're building new schools in Ontario communities and we're investing in school-based mental health supports and additional supports for students with special needs. Minister, could you please share what our government is doing to support student achievement and their well-being?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you to member for this important question. Mr. Speaker, our government is making historic investments in education, including \$625 million more in education supports in this upcoming year. Bringing our investment in education to a historic \$24.5 billion. This funding will add 2,000 more education workers in our schools so that children will have access to more mental health workers, guidance counsellors and education assistants. Speaker, we are also equipping students with mental health supports in education such as coping and resiliency skills as early as kindergarten and we're increasing investments in art education to \$21 million. This speaks to our top priority of supporting student well-being. In fact since 2003 our government has added 40,000 education work to our publicly funded education system. These investments in education are so important for students' well-being and will go where students and educators need it most.

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the Minister of education. I'm proud to represent a government that cares and is committed to providing opportunity to the people of Ontario and access to mental health workers was highlighted by the teachers I met with last week as being paramount for student success when we hear talks of efficiencies across the aisle, we know that means cuts. We can't afford to go back to a time where education is on the chopping block. In fact, Mr. Speaker, cutting just \$1 billion from our schools means thousands of teachers and education workers would be fired. I know that our government is focused on care, not cuts, by providing much needed investments in special education, mental health and an increase in guidance counsellors in our schools. Minister, can you tell us more about how investments in education are supporting Ontario students?

>> Minister Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks again to the member for this important question. Mr. Speaker, the \$24.5 billion investment will mean so much for staff and students. Instead of making cuts, we are making a clear choice to invest in helping our students achieve excellence in Ontario schools. Speaker, we are providing envelopes permanent funding of \$300 million of over three years, to support students with special needs. This funding will clear special education assessment backlogs and wait times while reducing stress on parents, educators and students. Just think about that. In addition to more staff, we will be able to support students across the province. This includes social workers, psychologists, speech language pathologists. Speaker, on this side of the House, we know that we need to invest in our students and invest in our school system and make sure our children are on a strong path to success.

MPP Fedeli to Minister Jaczek Re: Mental Health and Addiction Services

>> Vic Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the acting Premier. Front-line mental health care and addiction workers are feeling and struggling with an increasing burden every day in this province. In many places in Ontario, many are both struggling with mental health and addiction don't know where to go for help. In my riding in Nipissing, some head to the Nipissing district social service board office, which is in city hall in North Bay. One man showed up there last week and promptly collapsed in the hall, unresponsive. E.M.S. Was called and he was rushed to the hospital. You

can imagine how traumatic this is for the staff and for clients who are present at the same time. After 15 years, Speaker, we shouldn't be at this point. Toot acting Premier I ask, is this really the legacy the Liberals want to leave?

>> Minister Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And of course we have increased our investments in mental health a addictions dramatically over -- through all the years that we have been involved in government, and of course our investment in the 2018 budget a had historic investment of some \$2.1 million. It's the largest investment in Canadian history in mental health and addict services. We don't know much about the P.C.S' plan, but we do know that the leader of the official opposition has said that he is going to cut funding for supervised injection sites. This is obviously an addiction issue. We know that these harm reduction sites provide wraparound services for some of our most vulnerable people, supports that are saving hundreds of lives. So before the member opposite questions our budget, I'd like to hear a little bit more about what they are considering to do about mental health addictions, other than cutting the budget. Thank you.

>> Vic Fedeli: back to the acting Premier. The opioid crisis is well documented and deaths continue to rise to all-time highs in Ontario. More than 1,000 people last year alone. In the northeast lhin, which encompasses my riding of Nipissing, opioid abuse cases and mental health disorders are double the provincial average. The C.A.O. Of the Nipissing district social services board believes the local situation is in crisis. The board chair says, quote -- too many vulnerable people in our district are suffering needlessly. They are asking our northeast lhin to establish and lead a district crisis task force. Speaker, to the acting Premier -- Will the Minister of health connect the northeast lhin to work with our local officials and take action on this?

>> Minister Jaczek: Speaker, I'm having real difficulty reconciling the question from the member opposite with his leader's comments most recently this last week. Of course we've been extremely conscious of the opioid crisis and this is why we're investing \$222 million over three years to combat the opioid crisis. And of course part of our strategy has been expanding harm reduction services, hi more frontline staff and improving access to addiction supports across the province. So now we have made naloxone kits available to pharmacies, public holt units, police and fire services and we're now making an easy-to-use nasal spray available. Mr. Speaker, we are doing everything that we possibly can to combat this public health crisis. We will continue to do so. And I will take no lessons from the member opposite on this file.

MPP Forster to Minister Jaczek Re: Long-Term Care Spaces

>> MPP Cindy Forster: Thank you, saker. My question is to the acting Premier. The people who built this province and built our communities deserve comfort and dignity as they age. But too many people in my riding, the welland riding and across Ontario, cannot get the seniors care that they need. Over 32,000 people an the wait lists for long-term care and too many people simply cannot get the seniors care they need. They can't get it in their own language. They can't get their own foods and cultural activities that they've lived their entire L to get. Why has the Premier forced seniors to wait longer for long-term care than they need?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, we certainly acknowledge that we have a Collective responsibility to support our seniors and to ensure the very best quality of life and that is why our government has almost doubled funding for long-term care since 2003.as health care advancements tinue, our population is living longer and developing care needs that are becoming increasingly complex. And so, in our most recent budget, the 2018 budget, we're investing \$300 million over three years to increase staffing in long-term-care beds. This is of course in addition to our announcement of 5,000 new long-term-care beds over the next four years. We are working hard to ensure our seniors live in safety and dignity, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to do so.

>> MPP Forster: Well, Mr. Speaker, after 15 very long years, anything this government wanted to do, they could have and should have done already. But since this government took office 15 yearseing a the problems in seniors care have gotten worse, not better. Wait times for long-term care have

increased by 270%. And families in my riding, the welland riding, are stuck waiting for care for their grandparents and their parents. With just 45 days left in office, does the Premier regret not making seniors care a priority and leaving people seniors across Ontario without the care that they badly needed?

>> Minister Jaczek: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course through the years our plan for health care has been extremely comprehensive and the member opposite will know that seniors do like to stay in their own home for as long as possible. So our aging at home strategy a number of years ago, increased funding for home care, and we have continued to increase that each and every year. When it becomes unfortunately necessary for people to leave their homes, we have strengthened our retirement home community with new regulations in terms of safety and so on. We of course have announced our expansion of long-term-care beds. 30,000 new beds over the next decade. And we're continuing to rebuild and refurbish long-term-care beds across the province as well. We have a comprehensive plan. We will continue to ensure our seniors live in safety and dignity.

MPP Qaadri to Minister Ballard Re: Climate Change

>> MPP Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker many my question's for the Minister of environment and climate change. Speaker, last week was Earth week and yesterday was Earth day. Of course to celebrate I encourage community members in my own riding of Etobicoke to take actions like recycling, taking public transports well as reducing energy consumption. I also, Speaker, would like to compliment the leader of the opposition, Doug Ford, for perhaps his only initiative on greenhouse gas reduction, and that is from hiding from the press and getting rid of the media bus that would accompany him across Ontario. I believe that will save on greenhouse gas emissions across all around. Speaker, in Ontario we're making it a lot easier for everyone to do their part by investing billions in green programs including \$94million cycling infrastructure. Hundreds of millions of dollars in retrofits for homes, schools, hospitals, social housing and beyond. Speaker, our cap on pollution is \$2.4 billion and counting, and despite the unseasonal weather, cold when it's hot, hot when it's cold question. Unseasonal flooding there's a complete denial of climate change on the other side.

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. And thank you to the member from Etobicoke North for that question, which asks so many questions. I wish I had a lot more time to answer them all. I can tell you, Speaker, that on this side of the House we take the environment very seriously. A cornerstone of our protection of the environment is our protection and our fight against climate change, and that means our cap-and-trade system that we have here in Ontario, which in its first year, in its first year reduced industrial gas, greenhouse gas pollution, Speaker, and raised \$2. Billion in proceeds, every penny of which we are reinvesting into programs. To further reduce greenhouse gas pollution across Ontario. Speaker, I don't think getting rid of the media bus. Is a good idea. It takes transparency away. They can't ask the members opposite do they believe in climate change?