

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Monday, December 4, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
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MPP Brown to Minister Hoskins Re: Mental Health Services

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of health. It's great to be here in the legislature today to ask about the people's guarantee and I want my first question to the government about our people's guarantee to be our commitment for the largest investment in mental health in Canadian history. \$1.9 billion. \$1.9 billion worth of investment in mental health and my question to the Minister of health is can we get a commitment that the Liberal government will match that commitment? Will the Liberals invest \$1.9 billion into mental health and match our historic commitment?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the legislature, I think all of us in the legislature agree that mental health has to be top priority of any government in this province, in this country, around the world. We need to look at mental health with the same vigour and rigour that we do physical health, Mr. Speaker. Two sides of the same coin. I'm glad the leader of the official opposition is repeating the phrase that I've used often, which there can be no health without mental health, Mr. Speaker. It's an issue which can't be seen from a partisan perspective and that's why I'm so pleased this government, since coming into office in 2003, has made unprecedented investments in mental health, has increased the funding budget over budget over budget to those areas, those specific areas where we know that we will get the greatest impact, improve access. Focus on health equities and make a difference in the lives of individuals across this province.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of health. And by that response, I guess the government is not willing to match that commitment. And it's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker. It's a dirty little secret our health care system. In 1979, 11% of our health care budget was spent on mental health. Today it's 6%. Despite all the rhetoric, all this talk of the great work the Minister says the government has done, they have not gotten it -- got it done for the people of Ontario. We need to make sure mental health is treated as seriously as physical health and it's not today. People are being abandoned so I'll ask again. Will the government match the \$1.9 billion commitment for the Progressive Conservative party made in the people's guarantee?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, just this year alone we made three important investments in mental health on behalf of Ontarians. They were described in detail in the spring budget, the budget that that member and his party voted against, Mr. Speaker. It included the first ever program in Canada for cognitive behavioural therapy, an investment which will result in thousands upon thousands of Ontarians -- I think the estimate is about 100,000 Ontarians, will have access to a form of treatment which is proven in terms of the benefits of its outcomes, well proven, specifically for individuals with mood disorders like anxiety and depression and other mental health challenges. And so that investment that was announced in the spring budget, we have -- We are in the process of rolling that out, Mr. Speaker. It will make a difference in the lives of thousands upon thousands of Ontarians and that's just one program we're investing in.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of health. Once again the question about will they match the 1.9 billion-dollar commitment in mental health, the Minister didn't answer. He seems to think that everything's fine in Ontario. Mr. Speaker, if you break your leg and you go to the hospital, you're taken care of right away. If you have a mental health challenge. Public counselling, you have to wait 18 months. If you break your leg and say come back in 18 months, there are families I have spoken to who are devastated because a young person has a challenge to come forward and they're abandoned right now in our health care system. Things aren't rosy or great like the Minister says. The stats speak for themselves. 11% of the health budget was spent on mental health in 1979. It's 6% today. Despite all of the rhetoric, all the talk, they have dropped the

ball. They have let down Ontario families that are pleading for help in mental health. For the third time, will the government match the \$1.9 billion commitment made by the Progressive Conservative government in the people's guarantee?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, among the programs we've invested in is almost \$300 million for individuals that are experiencing and suffering from and challenged by the opioid crisis, the public health emergency we're facing right now with opioid overdoses and deaths, Mr. Speaker. \$300 million almost over the course of the next three years. The Conservative response to the opioid crisis, to ban pill presses. Mr. Speaker, we are making investment in up to ten youth wellness hubs across the province as well, Mr. Speaker. So wraparound funding to all of the necessary supports that children and youth require for them to stay healthy and get healthy if they're facing mental illness or mental health challenges, Mr. Speaker. Making these investments time and time again. Expert advice that we're getting from our stakeholders, advocates, from people with lived experience, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Brown to Minister Ballard Re: Greenhouse Gas Emissions

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the environment and climate change. And I'm going to have to paraphrase this headline because it contains some unparliamentary language but I'll try to get it out while respecting the chair. It's a "Maclean's" magazine headline. It says Kathleen Wynne's attack on the Ontario P.C. Plan is I'll use the word confuse voters, recognizing the parliamentary requirements. It added Premier Wynne is wrong. Hear that? Premier Wynne is wrong when she claims the Conservative carbon plan will cost families more than can be made up and do less to cut emissions. This comes -- get this Mr. Speaker -- from the very economist the Premier was trying to cite, saying the Premier is wrong. Facts do matter in Ontario, Mr. Speaker. So will the Liberals retract their attack and apologize for this --

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Indeed facts do matter and I'm waiting to hear some good facts from the other side, yet all I'm hearing is hyperbole. Speaker, what Ontario needs, what Ontario is getting is a realistic approach -- That balances action with affordability to fight climate change. That's what the voter is asking for in Ontario, Mr. Speaker. We don't take that lightly. Action, action with affordability, Speaker. Our system guarantees, guarantees emission reductions at the cheapest price possible for the people and the economy of Ontario, Speaker, and it invests every dollar, by law, every dollar -- Mr. Speaker, is invested in those things that will stop greenhouse gas emissions or reduce them, Mr. Speaker. This is a very active system we have.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister. The economist that the Premier cited Trevor Tanguay has said and I quote -- -- the Premier is very wrong. Her attack is baseless and simply untrue. It holds no weight. The Premier's claim that it will cost more and do less to cut emissions is wrong. Those are the facts by the very person the Premier is citing. And so given the fact that we know the Premier was wrong, I would hope the Minister would do the right thing, to have integrity to do the right thing and simply apologize for what was a false claim. We deserve that in this House. So once again to the Minister, will he apologize on behalf of the government for the false claims that have now been proven completely baseless and incorrect by the very economist --

>> Minister Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. You know, this P.C. Platform, using air quotes, is proof the Conservatives will say anything, absolutely anything to get elected. You know, Speaker, unlike the member of that party, we recognize that climate change is already costing us -- With increased insurance rates, higher food costs and more weather-related damage, Speaker. Yet their carbon tax scheme, scheme, under their scheme, consumers, the public will pay more, up to \$400 a year more in annual costs because of their scheme, Mr. Speaker. You know, the "National post" called it a shell game, noting that any tax cuts will be paid for by an 81%, 81% increase -- In the existing provincial tax on gasoline. You know, Speaker, they will fall short of the legislative -- Lowering emissions.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister, everywhere we look Liberal spin on the carbon

backstop is being disavowed. Economist Trevor tombay says the Premier is -- Wrong. Canadians for clean prosperity say the Liberals are. Wrong. Even the ecosystem says the Liberals are. Wrong. Mr. Speaker, the Premier is wrong. She has been caught saying an untruth. And so my question, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister, we'll give them -- and you know what? The Liberals are heckling. They got caught saying an untruth. But I want to give the Minister another chance. Will they apologize to the people of Ontario for stating a fact they know is incorrect and the very economist you quoted said you are wrong. Will you apologize?

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. I think this is proof positive that you can't shout your way into government, no matter how hard you try. You know, if there is an apology, Mr. Speaker, I'm waiting to hear for an apology from the leader of the opposition about how he tried to hide 6 billion in green project cuts in that scheme of a platform, Mr. Speaker. That's what I want to hear. Here's what their scheme is going to do, Mr. Speaker. It's going to cut funding for transit projects like the go regional express rail. It's going to cut green hospital renovations. It's going to cut repairs to schools and social housing, Mr. Speaker. It's going to cut Energy efficiency home renovations. All of the things, Mr. Speaker, that are helping this province meet its carbon reduction targets by 2050.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the acting Premier. The Minister of energy told reporters last week that the decision to include the Liberals' \$40 billion borrowing scheme on people's hydro bills was, quote, a wide-open process undertaken by Hydro One for clarity, end quote. Does the Premier want to correct the Minister ?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've said all along, electricity bills are a customer's main window into the electricity system and so we've always wanted to help consumers and give them the information they need, but we're hearing that it's information overload on the bills, Mr. Speaker, and that people find the bills unclear. One example, Mr. Speaker, is the debt retirement charge line. The debt retirement charge has been eliminated, and we thought it was -- made the most sense to keep it included, Mr. Speaker, with a zero so people understood it had been eliminated. In the end it led to more confusion for ratepayers, Mr. Speaker. So Hydro One has realized this and has been a leader in consumer research on ways to improve the appearance and comprehension of its bills, Mr. Speaker. They enlisted a research firm and engaged with thousands of customers to develop a new bill with a goal of increasing customer satisfaction and comprehension and test results, Mr. Speaker, have been very positive. Through the long-term energy plan. The consultation process, the government heard that customers wanted clearer and easier-to-understand klec list tri bills and that's what they're going to be getting through this whole process.

>> MPP Tabuns: Amazing. Speaker, again to the acting Premier. Who at the Cabinet table decided to horse Hydro One to include Liberal campaign messages in people's hydro bills?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 25% reduction that everyone is seeing right across the province and the actual 40 to 50% reduction that they're seeing on their bills in northern and rural communities, is the law, Mr. Speaker. This was brought forward through the fair hydro plan that it this government voted in favour of and the opposition voted against, Mr. Speaker. They actually voted against increasing the Ontario electricity support program that helps low-income individuals and seniors, Mr. Speaker. They actually voted against helping first nations by eliminating the delivery credit, Mr. Speaker. So when you're talking about the decisions being made at the Cabinet table and being made in caucus, it's actually helping those most vulnerable in our province with their electricity bills, Mr. Speaker. That is something that this government has done, and that party neglected, Mr. Speaker. Even in their pie-in-the-sky plan they never talked about helping first nations the way we have, and they didn't even include low-income individuals until the last page, Mr. Speaker. We've made sure we've helped those individuals right across the province.

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the acting Premier. I never occurred before Liberal

messaging on bills was going to help customers but that's an amazing admission. The truth is we know the Liberal government did direct energy companies, including Hydro One, to include Liberal campaign messaging on people's hydro bills. Government regulations now include, quote, a requirement that local distribution companies provide a customer-specific dynamic calculation of savings associated with the fair hydro plan from each billing period invoice. Does the purchase think it's right to use government regulation to force Hydro One and other local distribution companies to campaign for her party on people's hydro bills?

>> Minister Thibeault: So thank you again for the question, Mr. Speaker, because it allows me to clear up some of the confusion that he was talking about in that question that makes no sense, Mr. Speaker. What we did with Hydro One is we removed all the regulation, Mr. Speaker. They actually made the decisions to come up with their own bill after consulting, Mr. Speaker, with the research group, doing no cuss groups and trying to find ways to make the bill as clear as possible for ratepayers. Hydro One did that on their own, Mr. Speaker. They made sure that all of their ratepayers had a say in this process through their focus groups, and now they've brought forward what they're hoping is that main window to help ratepayers understand their bills and also understand the electricity system a lot better, Mr. Speaker. They're clarifying some of the language. They're making sure that on the bills that people have that window. They want to make it as clear as possible, and that's why we have the bill presentation group with E.D. A.s, Mr. Speaker, working on this right across the province.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Speaker, again to the acting Premier. There's no way the political message clarifies things for any ratepayer. The Minister was also asked last week if this line about the borrowing scheme on people's bills would be there after the election, when bills start to skyrocket again as a result of the Premier's wrong-headed hydro plan. He didn't answer that question either. So I'll try that one again in the House this morning. Will the Liberal government ensure that Hydro One will continue the practice of putting the Liberal hydro plan on people's bills after the election when bills start to skyrocket?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member well knows, all costs right now relating to electricity are being held to the rate of inflation for the next four years, something that he voted against, Mr. Speaker. Again voting against helping low-income individuals, voting against giving all families a 25% reduction, and when it comes to actual time-of-use pricing, Mr. Speaker, the O.E.B. is very clear and they announce every six months, Mr. Speaker, what they believe the price should be and that is something that has been done for quite a few years, Mr. Speaker, to make it as clear as possible for people to understand where bills are going and we're going to continue to see that happen, Mr. Speaker, because our regulator is a quasi-judicial organization making sure that they keep the interest of ratepayers at heart, Mr. Speaker. But when it comes down to, you know, nuts and bolts, Mr. Speaker, it's this government that made sure we brought forward a plan that helps every family right across the province with a 25% reduction, and it's the opposition party that voted against it, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the acting Premier. If this is about people having more information on how the amount on their bills is calculated then the line item about the plan should be a full explanation of the borrowing scheme. It should include the fact that any relief that people are seeing is temporary and that bills will go back up again. People should know that their hydro bills will be more expensive in future because of this plan. Will the Premier commit to including a full explanation of the effect of the hydro borrowing scheme on people's bills, including the \$40 billion in new debt?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know what the people of Ontario need to know? It's that party voted against giving them a 25% reduction on their bills, Mr. Speaker. It's that party that voted against helping low-income individuals, Mr. Speaker. It's that party that

voted against giving first nation as delivery credit, Mr. Speaker. It's that party that actually voted against the rrrp, giving northern and rural customers a 40 to 50% reduction on their bills. It's that party that continues to vote against everything that will help people in this province, Mr. Speaker. It is this government that brought forward a plan that makes sure that we can -- It's that party, Mr. Speaker, that continues to vote against ideas that actually help families right across this province, Mr. Speaker. It is this government and this Premier. That will continue to act to make a difference in the lives of people of Ontario each and every day. We can rely on them to vote no to that too, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Tabuns: To the acting Premier. And you can be sure, Speaker, that adding \$40 billion in debt to hydro bills will make a difference in people's lives. You can be sure of it. The Hydro One bill redesign was directed by this Liberal government. The Premier ensured that the Liberal campaign message was included on people's hydro bills, and she refuses to commit to including the full effect of the \$40 billion hydro borrowing scheme on people's bills. Why are the Premier, her Minister and Liberal government focused more on their reelections than on the tough task of making hydro more affordable for people in this province?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has been focused on reducing bills for customers right across the province for years, Mr. Speaker, and we never could rely on the opposition supporting that, Mr. Speaker, because they always voted against it. They voted against as I said the Ontario electricity support program. That actually doubled, Mr. Speaker. Help for seniors. Help for low-income individuals. Help for -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, a 25% reduction, put in front of this House, to make sure that we can help every single family in this province. And the opposition voted against that, Mr. Speaker. The fact is Mr. Speaker -- That we had a 40 to 50% reduction to help northern and rural customers. Opposition voted against that, Mr. Speaker. Now they come up with pie-in-the-sky plans. That won't do a thing to help families in this province.

MPP Jones to Minister Hoskins Re: Mental Health Services

>> MPP Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Minister of health. Last week when the Minister of health was questioned by my Colleague the MPP From Nepean- Carleton, he had a disappointing and frankly disrespectful response. He talked about some bank in Missouri from 1893. He said he found -- The Minister said when he quote scoured the internet high and low far and wide. Interesting but hardly useful. When the Minister of health was scouring the internet, did he find any self-help guides on how to answer questions with respect and compassion?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, so again I'm proud of our record on mental health. And I wish that the official opposition would have joined us this spring when we made unprecedented investments in mental health. In fact much of it the first of its kind in Canada. You know, and it goes back to the creation of a mental health and addictions leadership advisory council that I created shortly after coming into office as health Minister, and it was specific recommendations from that group of roughly 25 of the leading experts, chaired by Susan Pigott. A third of them individuals with lived experience, advocates, academics, and they came forward with what was -- each year they come forward with five recommendations. Their top recommendation last year was for cognitive behavioural therapy. We came through with that recommendation. Unfortunately that member voted against that investment.

>> MPP Jones: I am proud to say that an Ontario P.C. Caucus has never voted for Liberal economic -- We aren't asking about his promises -- My Colleague was asking about priorities. We want to know if you will match the largest provincial investment in mental health in Canadian history. Instead the Minister was dismissive and rude. He's had the weekend to consider his answer. Will the Minister prepare to apologize for his flippant remarks? Is he prepared to apologize for turning a question about mental health into a joke? Is he prepared to apologize to the member from Nepean- Carleton and all those with mental health illness?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, so when I was asked that question, I answered that question with regards to mental health. The entirety of my response was about our commitment as a government to mental health. At the end of that question, Mr. Speaker, I was asked by the opposition to sign onto their people's guarantee, which is something I would never do because it contains \$12 billion -- So the laughter, Mr. Speaker, after that question was obvious. In fact the member from Leeds-Grenville passed over to me a pen laughing suggesting that I would then sign on to the people's guarantee. Mr. Speaker, that was the context of the question and how it was asked. It was about a platform. It was about signing on to their commitment to cut \$12 billion. Billions every dollars in health care and education. We've been there before with the Conservatives. There's no way on this Earth I would ever sign on to that platform.

MPP Bisson to Minister Naqvi Re: Conservative Party Nomination Investigation

>> MPP Gilles Bisson: Speaker, to the Attorney General. Do the right thing and be transparent. That was the Premier's advice to the leader of the official opposition on what he should do while his party's being investigated by the police for fraud allegations in the nomination process. Sadly the Premier was speaking from exp Erience as was done in the case of investigations involving the Liberal party, will the Attorney General today ensure that there is Independence in any potential prosecution of the P.C. Party stemming from investigation into his nominations? Will the Attorney General hand the Conservative nomination criminal case to the public prosecution service of Canada?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I think the member knows that there is an investigation that is going on by the Police service in terms of a nomination meeting that took place for the Conservative party. Speaker, my understanding is that it's just an investigation at this point. There has been no criminal charges laid in that regard. I can tell you what the practice has been on -- when matters of those sensitive natures that we've always ensured that there's complete Independence and have referred those type of matters to the public prosecution service of Canada. I think it's too premature to start speculating about an ongoing investigation, and again my advice would be the same to everyone in the House as I have done so in the past, that we should refrain from discussing any ongoing investigation. And if the actual charges are laid, I'm fairly confident we will take the same step and make sure public -- go thank you.

>> MPP Bisson: There are currently two top Liberal operatives waiting to hear the court verdict in the case of the gas plant cover-up. In that case, before any charges were laid, the Attorney General made the decision to pass the case to the public prosecution service of Canada. Will the Attorney General and the Conservative party nomination scandal case -- hand it over to the prosecution service of Canada before any potential charges are laid?

>> Minister Naqvi: Speaker, our, of course, objective is always to make sure that any matter that is being dealt by the police or charges are laid, prosecuted are done so independently from the government, that there is no doubt whatsoever, that there's no political interference whatsoever. Speaker, I think our actions speak louder than words. We've always taken that position to make sure that those matters are referred to the public prosecution service of Canada. As I said, Speaker, if criminal charges are laid in the investigation that's taking place in regards to a Conservative party nomination in Hamilton area that we will take that step. Right now there is a police investigation going on which is independent from the government, from the ministry -- We should respect that process.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Hoskins Re: HIV/AIDS Care

>> MPP Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-

Term Care. Mr. Speaker, on Friday, December 1st, I attended an event recognizing world AIDS day at the Gilbert centre in my riding of Barrie where we took a moment to pause and remember all those who have loved their lives to H.I.V. And stand in solidarity with everyone impacted by this virus across Ontario and around the world. Medical treatment for H.I.V. Has advanced significantly in recent years, and with timely diagnosis and treatment, H.I.V. Is now a chronic but manageable condition for many. For most who are diagnosed early and receive proper treatment, it is often undetectable and virtually impossible to pass on. Last year alone our government invested more than \$60 million for hiv/aids related programs, to support an evidence-informed client-centered community-based response to H.I.V. And AIDS. Could the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please tell us the important initiatives that this government is taking to support the health and well-being of people affected by --

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member from Barrie for that very important question and for really, Mr. Speaker, allowing me to discuss an issue that many of us including myself are very passionate about and committed to. Mr. Speaker, two to three people are diagnosed with hiv/aids every single day in this province, and we are as a government and a ministry committed to supporting each and every one of them. I would first like to recognize the dedicated individuals and organizations whose courageous work over the past decades have helped to reduce new H.I.V. Infections and improve the health and well-being of people affected by this virus, Mr. Speaker. Last week on world AIDS day we announced that we're investing an additional 2.7 million this year to further support the health care of community hiv/aids programs. An additional 1 million for harm reduction outreach workers at 19 organizations and 3 million for harm reduction supplies across the province.

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for his answer. We have come so far from the time when this once little understood disease killed so many within only a few months or years of being diagnosed. In our own province, through the work of strong advocates, researchers, patients, caregivers and health care professionals committed to fighting the disease, the number of new H.I.V. Diagnosis has been falling steadily from 1,104 in 2006 to 881 in 2016. We know that our government's approach to hiv/aids has included prevention, education, testing, treatment, support services and research. Would the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please share with us what else has been done to improve access to care and reduce the stigma of those living with hiv/aids?

MPP Martow to Minister Jaczek Re: Developmental Disabilities Support

>> MPP Gila Martow: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the Deputy Premier. Ontario families of children with complex disabilities have been let down by this Liberal government. Sherry Caldwell has a daughter Ashley with chromosome 14 Q deletion syndrome a complex disorder and they are here at queen's park to tell us the government is failing children with complex diagnoses. In fact they're in the Speaker's gallery with their friends Linda and her daughter Vanessa. Will the Minister agree all children deserve adequate rehabilitation and financial support?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this question, and I'd certainly like to welcome the Ontario disability coalition members who are here with us today because of course on this side of the House we are absolutely committed to helping families who care for a loved one with a development or other developmental or other disability and we recognize the challenges they face every day. So on behalf of my Colleague, the Minister of children and youth services, we are implementing a special needs strategy in partnership with ministries across our government and the special needs strategy includes identifying children's needs earlier, coordinating service planning for children and youth with multiple and/or complex special needs, and integrating the delivery of rehabilitation services. So in 2016/17 the ministry of children and youth services allocated more than \$600 million for programs and services for children and youth. With special needs and their families. Thank you.

>> MPP Martow: To the Minister. Sherry Caldwell was told that her daughter's physiotherapy hours

were going to be cut and that it's up to her to teach Ashley how to walk. The physiotherapist told this devoted mum to teach Ashley to walk at home holding onto the wall. Mr. Speaker, sherry's doing her part and feels that this government isn't doing theirs. Will the Minister explain why families of children with complex needs feel they must come all the way down to queen's park to protest and hold press conferences to get this Liberal government's attention?

>> Minister Jaczek: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we do acknowledge that children with complex needs do require very individualized care plans. But during this last year, we have had over 81,000 children and youth receive rehabilitation services, and they are certainly investments that we think are extremely important. So I'm particularly interested that the P.C. Party is asking this question, because in looking at their platform, we know that they are going to make \$12 billion worth of cuts. They have no plan for children and youth with developmental disabilities specifically. There's no money for new -- hardly remember the P.C. Party also voted against improving children's -- It's clear Patrick Brown will say anything to anyone at any time in order to get elected, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Sattler to Minister Hunter Re: School Repairs

>> MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Both the Liberals and the P.C.S before them failed to address maintenance and repair issues in Ontario schools, letting down students and families and resulting in a repair backlog of more than \$15 billion. 3 \$3.7 billion is needed for one board alone, the Toronto District School Board. Last week NDP Leader Andrea Horwath announced a commitment to fixing the rule for education development charges, as part of our plan to fund desperately needed school repairs. Speaker, in the absence of any kind of long-term plan from this Liberal government, will the acting Premier at least allow school boards like Toronto to move forward with local solutions to the repair backlog by letting them levy education development charges for school renewal and repair?

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for this question. Mr. Speaker, there is no government in the history of this province that has invested more in schools infrastructure than this government, Mr. Speaker. When you look at the number of schools that we have built brand new or expanded significantly, Mr. Speaker, it is remarkable. We have a program in place, Mr. Speaker, that is focused on expanding schools, renewing schools, Mr. Speaker. We've committed \$1.4 billion to school renewal. And, Mr. Speaker, I've met with the groups in Toronto to talk about education development charges. It's something that I've committed to looking at, Mr. Speaker, but we have to think of the broad impact. It's not just one area of the city or the province that needs to be looked at. It has to do with across our system, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we're doing the best possible thing for students in our education system to ensure fairness across the board.

>> MPP Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the acting Premier. Families across the province should not have to worry about their children's safety in our schools. But after two decades of P.C. And Liberal neglect, students are facing unbearable classroom temperatures, broken-down washrooms, leaky roofs and lead in the water pipes. Last month the Ontario public school boards association called for a review of education development charges to allow more local flexibility for school boards across Ontario to tackle the repair backlog. Speaker, will this Liberal government join the NDP, join the Ontario public school boards association, join the Toronto District School Board, join Toronto city council and commit to fixing the rules for education development --

>> Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. Because when you look at the commitment from the NDP in their last platform, it was 60 -- Mr. Speaker, it was \$60 million. That's just 4% of what we are committing to school repairs and renewals. Millimetre on this side of the House we're serious about our schools. We're serious about our investments that we're making in our students, Mr. Speaker. And that is why we have invested almost \$17.5 billion in capital funding, which is supporting 820 new schools and more than 800 additions and significant retrofits, Mr. Speaker. So we will continue to look at the system. I've committed to doing that, Mr. Speaker. But I have to look at the broad impacts across our education system. In terms of what these charges will do. In the

meantime, we will continue to invest in the repair and in the renewal of all our schools, Mr. Speaker

MPP Martins to Minister Lalonde Re: Emergency Management Action Plan

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of community safety and correctional services. Climate conditions and technology are evolving rapidly in today's world. We see what used to be once-in-a-generation climate event regularly across our planet. Geopolitical forces have become more fluid and these forces highlight the importance of emergency management. Ontario's a safe place to live and raise a family but I also know that we have to be ready for anything should the unthinkable happen. Mr. Speaker, could the Minister inform the House on what measures this government is taking to ensure a modern and adaptable emergency management system?

>> Minister Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much to the member from Davenport for the important question. Mr. Speaker, however infrequently sites of emergencies are in Ontario, we know we must be proactive and prepared. That's why our government announced our new emergency management action plan last week. As the member said, the world is changing rapidly and we must have a plan that is equally as adaptive. We will be recruiting a dedicated chief of emergency management to ensure effective oversight and to champion the changes we are making. They will help lead our efforts to review and update our emergency management legislation and our provincial emergency response plan to ensure that they are in line with best international practices. Mr. Speaker, I look forward to providing. More detail on our plan to ensure the continued safety of each and every Ontarian.

>> MPP Martins: I want to thank the Minister for her answer. Enhancing Ontario's emergency management system is in all of our best interests. Events like the 2013 ice storm that affected my riding of Davenport and so much of Toronto often come without warning. A strong proactive approach to emergency management is necessary to keep people safe during and after incidents such as these. Although it can be uneasy to think of these events happening in Ontario, we know that we must plan to help and protect Ontarians in emergencies. Mr. Speaker, could the Minister further detail the new emergency management action plan and what it means for Ontarians?

>> Minister Lalonde: Thank you very much. The member from Davenport to the supplementary. Responding to emergencies is always a collaborative effort. Government, first responders and the community all come together to manage any crisis and that's why we are increasing supports to our municipalities by making it easier to access critical supplies and resources through an enhanced supply chain program and by improving information and resource sharing through our new emergency management software. We're also investing in a light tower search and rescue team in Thunder Bay so specialized resources can be deployed quickly in an emergency. By working together, we know we can increase our emergency management capacity, which is why we're also pursuing agreement with neighbouring provinces and states to share supports -- Forces. Mr. Speaker, through our new emergency management action plan, we are making comprehensive change to our system to ensure we as a province are ready for anything.

MPP Fedeli to Minister Thibeault Re: Northern Healthcare Funding

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of energy. I'm handing page Adam a copy of a book delivered to -- of the people's guarantee to deliver -- Speaker, he's the member from Sudbury. The member who did an interview with the "Sudbury star" obviously without reading the section of our platform that he referenced. I ask the Minister to turn to page 67. The page has been flagged for you. Speaker, I would ask the Minister to please read into the record

the paragraph in blue -- I was asking the Minister to read into the record the paragraph in blue on the left-hand side.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad this is a question related to energy, because, you know, I could talk all about how they're actually trying to sneak in our plan in -- because they voted against it but they can't come up with a good idea so they use ours. When it comes to, Mr. Speaker, looking at investing in northern Ontario, it is this government that is bringing forward investment after investment for northern Ontario, and they actually hide that, Mr. Speaker, in \$6 billion in cuts. What are they going to cut, Mr. Speaker? Is it teachers? Is it nurses? Is it the infrastructure that we're building in northern Ontario in his community, Mr. Speaker? Is that what they're talking about? So I'd be happy if they could read into the record, Mr. Speaker, all the cuts that they're going to make, all the cuts that they're going to make sure that the people of Ontario are going to continue to suffer on, Mr. Speaker, because that is the history and the legacy of that party, Mr. Speaker. Making sure that they can cut everything and making sure people suffer. We build this province up and will continue to --

>> MPP Fedeli: Speaker, I can understand Liberals' problem with a 22.5% tax cut. They've never delivered one before. That's why they don't understand it, Speaker. This Minister told the "Sudbury star" quote there's nothing -- Told the Sudbury star, quote -- dlr's nothing on neokids in the platform but page 67, the one he won't read, it clearly lays out the P.C. Support for neokids. In the if the Minister weekend read the paragraph I will. Quote Patrick Brown and the Ontario P.C.S will expand the neokids health hub in Sudbury. And it goes on, Speaker. We're talking about \$45 million towards expand, the neokids health hub and other organizations, Speaker. Why did the Minister say something that he knows is completely untrue? Is it because his Liberal government -- Has no plan for neokids? Mr. Speaker, will the member from Sudbury correct his record and stand up for Sudbury families?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When you look at what they're talking about in their document, we know there's \$6 billion of cuts but they're talking about \$45 million and four programs in that piece, Mr. Speaker, and it's actually a \$40 million program the neokids is looking for, something that they maybe should learn about, Mr. Speaker. Because when it comes to northern Ontario, when it comes to Sudbury, let's talk about what we've invested. \$2 million for the hospice, Mr. Speaker. \$26 million for Mr. Speaker. We've got \$23 million for new schools coming, Mr. Speaker. That is an endless list of investments we're seeing in northern Ontario thanks this government. Expanding highway 69. We've invested in the Sault and in North Bay. Making shire we're building this province up. So while they continue to guarantee cuts to the people of Ontario, we will continue. To guarantee to build this province up and look after our province unlike the opposition.

MPP Taylor to Minister MacCharles (Jaczek) Re: Developmental Disabilities Support

>> MPP Monique Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for acting Premier. Yesterday was international day for persons with disabilities. One year ago when we celebrated this day, you promised an education accessibility standard. Today we are still waiting for the committee to be appointed that would propose those standards. Meanwhile, children and youth with disabilities, those with developmental and intellectual disabilities, mental conditions, autism, mobility issues, blindness or deafness are floundering in our schools. Why does it take a full year just to appoint an advisory committee? Speaker, will this Liberal government appoint that committee today?

>> MPP Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker, for the question. And I'm actually very pleased to have a question on this topic as we move forward with our standards development committee process, these are not advisory committees, Speaker. These are very technical expert committees that are involved in creating new standards and moving forward with the one on health care as well as the education one. Speaker, we have consulted in recent months on what these standards should look like, particularly the education standard that the member opposite talks about. And, Speaker, we will be actually creating two standards, one for kindergarten to grade 12 and one for

postsecondary. I not Minister of education will want to respond in the supplementary question. We had so much feedback -- Complication. We've had so many applicants in standards development committees. I'm looking forward to making --

>> MPP Taylor: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the acting Premier. Today the Ontario disability coalition is at Queen's Park. They're here to report on the serious lack of hands-on therapy for all children and youth with disabilities. They're here to remind us that every Ontarian deserves to be provided with the opportunities to live without discrimination in services, services they need to survive, thrive and succeed in their fight on behalf of their children, they are frustrated by the endless wait lists, skeletal frontline staff as well as inequitable and inadequate funding. Will the Liberal government commit today to adequate funding to ensure all children and youth with disabilities get the treatment and support they need and are entitled to?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said earlier we do invest in \$600 million in these services for children with these complex needs. And in particular, those that are extremely complex get the specialized supports that they need such as respite, that help support families, in-home supports, treatment and residential services in urgent situations. So the special needs strategy is rolling out across the province, and we want to ensure everyone knows where they can actually go when they have a concern about their child's development because we know that children and youth with special needs need to be identified and supported as early as possible. And so they will have access to coordinated service planning. They'll receive seamless and effective therapies -- Speech language, occupational and physio from birth through to the end of school. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Rinaldi to Minister Leal (McGarry) Re: Christmas Tree Industry

>> MPP Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the Minister of agriculture, food and rural affairs. Minister, now that December's upon us, families across Ontario are beginning to ring in the holiday season. Minister, this is the season to enjoy all the great things Ontario has to offer from our locally grown Christmas trees to our tasty foods and beverages. A long-standing tradition for many of the families across Ontario is bundling up, get in the car, sipping on a hot chocolate and driving to a local Christmas tree farm. I know that I'm very thankful for our tree farmers who work hard all year round for communities across the province to share the joy of a Christmas tree. We all know good things grow in Ontario, Minister. With over 600 Christmas tree farms across the province, which makes it easy to buy local. Minister, would you please share with the members of this House how important it is to recognize Christmas. Here in Ontario?

>> Minister Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member from Northumberland-Quinte West for his excellent question this morning. It's always great to see the little spruce of the holiday spirit in this House. I want to acknowledge the work of my friend, good friend from Simcoe-Grey because last Saturday we celebrated December 2nd communities across the province celebrate Ontario's third annual Christmas tree day. And visiting one of the many tree farms and nurseries that Ontario has to offer. As you know, Speaker, preparing for the holidays is easy when you decide to buy a local tree. Christmas tree day is a great way to celebrate the hard work and dedication of our tree farmers provide day in and day out and also offers family day tree-mendous holiday tradition. Ontario grown Christmas trees contribute \$11.3 billion to the economy each year, supporting jobs and growth in Ontario's agri-food sector and environmentally sustainable way for people across the province to celebrate. Mr. Speaker, we do know why. So many people are buying Christmas trees in Ontario --

>> MPP Rinaldi: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. Speaker, I want to acknowledge -- first Santa pet parade with my daughter MARIA and her dog Marc Arrr. To the Minister, I know just how important the Ontario Christmas tree industry is to all Ontarians who enjoy the holiday season. Ontario Christmas tree industry employs hard working Ontarians with farms located across the province to help provide families with a pine, fir or spruce tree to decorate their House with every

holiday season. I also know that Ontario government supports these farmers Ontario wood brand to support and grow the sector. Would the Minister explain how important our Christmas tree farms are to Ontario?

>> Minister Kathryn McGarry: Thank you to the member for northumberland-quinte west for that important question about Ontario's Christmas tree industry. I know that many Ontarians will be sprucing up their homes this season and pining for a large tree. Christmas tree farms are a very important low-carbon industry for Ontario, one that produces a product that's 100% biodegradable. Ontario's Christmas tree industry supports thousands of Ontarians in multiple sectors, including farming, transportation and retail. This industry generates over \$11 million in sales annually with around 650 tree farms across the province. We also export thousands of Christmas trees generating even more economic activity. Christmas tree farms cover over 14,000 acres of land across Ontario and the Ontario wood tag marked. Ontario grown trees both at live tree farms and local retailers. I decorated a live tree this past Saturday. I encourage all members of the House to do same.

MPP Barrett to Minister Leal Re: Wildlife Compensation Fund

>> MPP Toby Barrett: To the Minister of agriculture, food and rural affairs. I'm hearing complaints from cattle men and other live stock producers about the new Ontario wildlife compensation program. I wish to quote your October 16th letter about predation. Mr. Speaker, Al investigators play a vital role, end quote. However, I'm hearing the opinions of municipal investigators are being ignored. Minister, why are the opinions of municipal investigators being ignored? Why don't you trust farmers?

>> Minister Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the question this morning from my good friend member from Haldimand- Norfolk. Indeed we trust our municipal evaluators. If the Honourable member had have been at my speech that I delivered to the annual meeting of the ofa about a week ago, we announced that we're doing a review of the compensation program in the province of Ontario. I know my home riding of Peterborough, I've actually been in farmers' fields to see the damage that predators have done, particularly with sheep and goats. I recall a particular circumstance with a fisher that attracted a young sheep in the municipality of Asheville Norwood. So we'll continue to work with our partners in all this. As I said as the member would know I announced in my ofa speech we're conducting a full review of red atif compensation in Ontario.

>> MPP Barrett: Minister ofa is hearing about these kinds of problems right across Ontario. As we understand tone in five claims for predation kills are rejected by your staff. They don't visit the scene. They're not on the ground, even though you advocate for evidence-based decision making. So it's left livestock owners out in the cold. We hear of cases where a lamb or a calf has been carted off by coyotes. There's no evidence. There's no blood. There's no carcass. Minister, I just want to pin this down. Will you commit to create a better system to compensate for predator kills, for example when a coyote eats the evidence?

>> Minister Leal: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend for supplementary this morning. That is precisely why I've asked the review to be put in place. Because I've been in the fields and I've seen -- I've been with many good friend. My farmers of Peterborough county, to see the exact example that the member's talking about. But we on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we have a program in place that is not working, is not meeting the expectations in this particular case of farmers in Ontario, we commence a review. That is the responsible way to conduct public policy in the province of Ontario, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Gates to Minister Ballard Re: Niagara River Contamination

>> MPP Wayne Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Minister, the international joint commission just released a report credits sizing the lack of action to address sewage spills in the great Lakes. There certainly has been a lack of action by the Premier to address the dumping of sewage into the niagara river this past summer. Water contamination in our province goes well beyond just raw sewage in the niagara river. Last week the international joint commission released its first assessment on the progress by both the US And Canadian government on the protection of our great Lakes and our rivers. The report highlighted that this government has only identified eight chemicals that could harm our Lakes and our rivers. How can we eliminate or prevent toxic chemicals in the niagara river, Lake Ontario or lake Erie when this government won't do the research to identify -- Which chemicals are toxic? How does this government claim to be a leader on environmental protection yet still allow --

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you for that important question. You know, this government strongly believes in the importance of protecting the quality of the Lakes and the waters of Ontario. We've gone to great lengths to do that, Speaker, in terms every legislation but not only legislation in terms of enforcement. I know the unfortunate incident that the member opposite is talking about with regards to a discharge by a city in the state of New York. We of course don't have any jurisdiction over the state of New York, not as -- at least yet, but we have put in place a process, Mr. Speaker, where biwe're veesing and improving communications with their state so that we can -- About discharges.