

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Thursday, April 26, 2018

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Date: Thu, 26 Apr 2018 11:44:39 -0400
Attachments: 20180426 - Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript.doc (114.69 kB)

Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 3rd Session
Thursday, April 26, 2018

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Fedeli to Premier Wynne (McMahon) Re: AG Pre-Election Report

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you and good morning, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. The response to yesterday's shocking revelations from the auditor general that this government has deliberately understated Ontario's deficit by \$5 billion this year has been swift. The Ontario chamber of commerce issued a statement yesterday after the auditor affirmed Ontario actually has an \$11.7 billion deficit. They wrote, quote -- if the province of Ontario were a publicly held company, we as shareholders derive and demand clarity and accountability from our board and our auditors. This is similarly our right as Ontarians. Speaker, business confidence in this government is shaken. Is the Premier's reelection bid worth destabilizing investment confidence in Ontario?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister responsible for treasury board, president of the treasury board is going to want to comment on this. Mr. Speaker, in fact the only reason that we are having this conversation is that this government, Mr. Speaker, introduced the fiscal transparency and accountability act and, therefore, there is a pre-election report, Mr. Speaker. That's why we are having this conversation. So, you know, I think that, through the pre-election report, the office of the auditor general's analysis, Ontarians are given the information that they need to make an informed decision, Mr. Speaker. The fact is there is an ongoing dispute between professional accountants. That is a reality. It's been going on for a couple of years, Mr. Speaker. It is absolutely true that there is a disagreement between -- Just to say, Mr. Speaker, it is an ongoing dispute between professional accountants. We recognize that. Accept the perspectives of the auditor general but that dispute has been going on for a couple of years, Mr. Speaker.

>> Vic Fedeli: Back to the Premier. No, Speaker. We're having this conversation because the government continues to present an incorrect picture of the province's finances. The Ontario chamber had even more to say. They wrote, quote -- it is deeply concerning that the government of Ontario would be accused of not following Canadian public sector accounting standards. Speaker, when the auditor general summed it up, she said, quote -- when expenses are understated, the perception is created that the government has more money available than it actually does. Just in time for a pre-election budget. How convenient. Speaker, the Premier needs to know the jig is up. Will she admit the government's numbers are wrong?

>> Minister Eleanor McMahon: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member opposite for his question, because it provides me with the opportunity to provide some much-needed context to this discussion, Speaker. First of all I again want to thank the auditor general for her response to the pre-election report. We appreciate her work to ensure that the public received an independent assessment of our province's assessment. Let me remind the House of something critically important. We passed legislation to do this, Speaker. So the notion that we aren't being transparent is not only factually incorrect, it risks sending a negative and inappropriate message to the people of Ontario. And that is exactly what they're doing, Speaker. They're not -- The member's offices, Speaker, want to continue to undermine confidence in our province and our provincial institutions, that's up to them. But here's precisely what the auditor said. In case the member opposite missed it. The pre-election report provides a reasonable and a cautious and the medium-term fiscal forecast. He said we were reasonable and cautious and we stand by that.

>> Vic Fedeli: Back to the Premier. Actually, Speaker, we on this side of the House and the people of Ontario, they understand that it's the government that puts the government at risk. Nobody else, Speaker. The auditor general's job is to state the true picture of Ontario's finances. Now based on the auditor's shocking revelation, here's more from the Ontario Chamber of commerce. Quote -- the government of Ontario and through them the people of Ontario either respect our legislative officers

or we do not. That is exactly why Ontario P.C. Leader Doug Ford has committed a full audit of the government's books to restore responsibility, accountability and trust in government. Speaker, can the Premier tell us today what is the government of Ontario -- Can the Premier tell us today exactly what is the government of Ontario's deficit for 2018/19?

>> Minister McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, Speaker, listening to the rhetoric from the opposite side, let me just respond to something very important that the member opposite just said. Implicitly, the leader of the P.C. Party Doug Ford, is now questioning the auditor general's competency and I'll tell you why. He says that he's going to provide independent audits. Guess what that discounts, Speaker? Our professional and highly competent public servants. Our professional Deputy Minister of the treasury board and the Deputy Minister of finance that not only sign off on our fiscal plan, give us precisely the kind of advice and confidence in our books, Speaker, that we need. And by the way, when it comes to some of the -- the auditor general outlined in her report we also had independent advice, Mr. Speaker, by some of the most credible accounting firms in the world. We stand by that, Mr. Speaker. We respectfully remind the member opposite that we have a respectful disagreement with the auditor general and once again, we thank her for her work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Fedeli to Minister McMahon (Sousa) Re: AG Pre-Election Report

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Premier. The auditor general was clear. The government's deficit numbers are off by \$5 billion this year, \$5.5 billion next year and \$6 billion off, almost 100% off the following year. Those revealed deficits are projected to grow to a total of \$16.6 billion over the next three years. We now know that in their desperation the Premier and this government have betrayed the public's trust. That's why our leader Doug Ford has today promised that, when elected, we will launch an independent commission of inquiry. This new commission will get to the bottom of the Liberals' deficit scandal and propose timely solutions to solving the deficit problem. Speaker, why does it always take the OPP, the auditor general or an investigative commission to get to the truth with this Premier?

>> Minister Eleanor McMahon: Speaker, you know, it's troubling in the -- to say the least the member opposite would conflate the respected opinion of an independent of this legislature with motive or intent. As he felt of the former OPP Officer, I can tell you clearly, Speaker, that this is not about that. What this is about and we said it yesterday is a couple of things. Number one reminding the public of the confidence that's necessary in our public institutions and not undermining those, which is precisely what the member opposite doing. Second we thank the auditor general for her service and remind this House and Ontario public that we have a difference of opinion, and that is a respectful difference of opinion, Speaker, and it will remain so, because we are committed to seeking professional advice from professional accountants. We did that, but we also have a highly respected public service. The member opposite diminishes that when he talks about the credibility of our work, Speaker, and our work as a provincial government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> Vic Fedeli: Well, thank you. Back to the Premier. This is not about a difference of opinion, Speaker. This is about desperation. We cannot trust anything in Liberal government ever estimates or projects again. Their budget is no longer worth the paper it was printed on. The people of this province are angry and they want answers. Doug Ford and the Ontario P.C.S are going to get those answers. It took 15 years for the Liberals to create this mess and it will not be resolved overnight. But we will restore Ontario to fiscal health in a responsible manner. Speaker, I'll ask the Premier one more time, why does it always take the OPP, the auditor general or an investigative commission. To get to the truth with this Premier and this government?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: So, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite now wants to do an audit of the auditor. The Minister -- the member opposite -- I'm not sure what independent auditing team they intend to use. Is it KPMG? Deloitte? E&Y or Doug Ford that's going to go out there and look at the books, Mr. Speaker. Let me be clear -- Mr. Speaker, the auditor general does make clear that the pre-election report does provide a reasonable and cautious underpinning of those fiscal forecasts that we made.

The auditor general only reflects on two issues and they've been the same two issues for the past number of years. It's the reflection of pension assets which the auditor general feels we should actually discount, but every other auditor, including herself in the past, has agreed with. And the second one is a fair hydro plan, which these independent. World renowned accounting firms have prepared. She says it's not wrong to actually do this kind of rate regulation. She doesn't like it and that's not --

>> Vic Fedeli: Back to the Premier. The auditor general told us yesterday in her news conference that when you get push-back from the government, like she's getting, that's the time for Ontario to worry, Speaker. And now it's obvious to everyone in Ontario how this election document the Liberals tabled was a 100% sham. None of the care promises were included in the budget legislation. Only the tax increases made it in. Speaker, this Premier can never be trusted again. But I tell the people of Ontario that help is on the way. Doug Ford and the Ontario P.C.S., we will deliver our commitments, clean up the scandals and the waste and protect the services that people of Ontario deserve. And we will not quit until we have restored responsibility, accountability -- and trust --

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is claiming that they are not going to help the people of Ontario. They're going to cut programs for the people of Ontario. They're going to cut the services, cut the investment and cut the ability for Ontario to be strong and continue to grow. So, Mr. Speaker, dated April 24th, a couple of days ago, by a rating agency. And this is what they said. DBRS Limited said this -- the province of Ontario has and respectfully has confirmed Ontario's electricity, financial, corporation and long-term obligations as well as the province's rating as double-A. The trend on all ratings are stable including O.P.G., IESO and the province of Ontario. That's going on and they're supporting Ontario all the way, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Del Duca) Re: Healthcare Funding

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Premier. Can the Premier explain to Ontarians why it was more important for her to have the lowest corporate tax rate in Canada than it was to fund hospitals and health care?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, we believe that we have to be competitive and we have to provide services for people in this province, Mr. Speaker. That's actually the role of government. It's extremely important that business wants to be here, that job creation can happen, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, since I've been the Premier, 400,000 net new jobs have been created, Mr. Speaker, mostly in the private sector. So it's extremely important that those jobs are created because, Mr. Speaker, that is how the wealth of the province is created and then we can make the investments in health care and education that are needed, and we have every year, Mr. Speaker. Every budget we have increased funding to health care. We have increased funding to education, Mr. Speaker. And we will continue to do so. One does not exist without the other. It's not possible to have one without the other. That doesn't include job creation and investment in its people, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, it's about sharing the wealth. That's the issue, Speaker. This is what the Liberals never have been able to figure out. The Premier's tax cuts have put money in the pockets of the wealthiest Ontario firms and into the bank accounts of Ontario's most profitable corporations. Those dollars came out of hospitals and health care, Speaker. And the result is that we now have health care in Ontario. Does the Premier think that that's right?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I wonder when the NDP -- You know, they were on this tack yesterday. I wonder they stand up and basically argue that we should not be a competitive jurisdiction, that we should find ways to be uncompetitive, Mr. Speaker. I wonder where they believe the funds come from to invest in health care, to invest in education. Mr. Speaker, there is an integral relationship between the life of this province to create wealth, to create an environment where business can thrive, to create jobs. In this province, Mr. Speaker, we are at an unemployment low of 20 years, Mr. Speaker. We have not had such low unemployment. And that's

because it's us who have been created. It's because people can find jobs. It's because we're competitive. And at the same time, Mr. Speaker, we are making record investments in health care. Those two things go together, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, do we meet with Chambers of commerce across Ontario and over and over they tell me that businesses count on our health care system. It is one of our best competitive advantages. Hurting our health care system is actually bad for business. I have a plan to make our tax system fair. Corporate taxes will be below the national average, below states like California, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut, Wisconsin, but it will ask the wealthiest people and most profitable corporations to pay fair share so that we can end hallway medicine, something that is in all of our interests, Speaker. Why doesn't the Premier get that?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: As the Premier has said on repeated occasions in response to these kinds of questions from the NDP, we know that we have prosperity here in the province of Ontario because our Premier and our government continue to invest in our people, continue to invest in the core public services of the people of this province. Public health care, including public education, and also ensure that we have a competitive tax regime in place so that this entire province can prosper, Speaker. That's been the focus of our work over the last number of years, and it will continue to be as we go forward, because we know that we've had economic success, but we need this province to share in that prosperity and success, and that's what we're looking for. Thanks very much, Speaker.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Jaczek) Re: Healthcare Funding

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: My next question's also for the Premier. Every dollar that the Premier hands to the wealthiest Ontarians comes from someone's share. Under this Premier, it came from hospitals. Four years of frozen budgets, Speaker. It's no wonder that there's a crisis in health care. When the Premier refuses to have anyone pay for it. Why is the Premier more interested in tax cuts than fixing health care?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, you know, I believe that our health care system is two things. It is the finest expression of our values and our belief as a society that we have a responsibility to care for each other, Mr. Speaker, and it is also, as the leader of the third party says, it is also a competitive advantage. She's absolutely right about that. And the reason it's a competitive advantage, Mr. Speaker, is that it is excellent. And so when I talk to businesses in other countries that are looking at Ontario and considering investing here, Mr. Speaker, when they're investing their businesses here, they do look at our health care system. It is excellent. One of the reasons it is excellent, Mr. Speaker, is we have continued to invest in it. If there are more nurses, Mr. Speaker. Our wait times are among the best in the country. That's why now that there's more to be done. We recognize that. There's \$822 million in our budget for Mr. Speaker. There was \$500 million last year just for hospitals to make sure the hospitals have the resources they need. That's the health care system, Mr. Speaker. It is part of our competitive advantage and it will continue to be, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, unlike this Premier, my value system does not include the people of Ontario. My value system does not include people who are being treated in hospital hallways because the Premier would rather hand money to her rich friends than invest in our hospitals. And if people think that it is bad now, Doug Ford's cut of health care privatization will make things even worse. It's during the crisis that this Premier has created. And Doug Ford certainly knows that the answer is that the system will, in fact, end hallway medicine. And my question is why did the Premier let things get so bad, Speaker?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about what we need to happen at this point, Mr. Speaker. I -- you know, I completely reject the notion that the leader of the third party puts forward that I don't believe that there's more investment that's needed, Mr. Speaker, or that it's acceptable for

people to get care that's not adequate. Of nd, Mr. Speaker, we hanse wade investments every single year in our health care Sth: Tee O of nd, Mr. Speaker, what we of re saying now is that there is more investment that is theedelac Mr. Speaker. We've beenspeery car. I said earlier \$82 million. We know that's the number that we hanse worked with the Ontario hospital association. That investment is in our budgefoc Mr. Speaker. But last year there was a \$500 million investment, Mr. Speaker, because we recogatesor D that as the pPremier,ulation ages, as there are growth parts of the province where there's more pPremier,ulation and more need, we make sure that those parts of the province and that hospitals across the province. We recour heatesor that there's more that neemia to be done but we

>>Andrea Horwath: [Beginning cut off] We didn't have to end up here, speaker. But there is hope. An N.D.P. Government will fix it. Will this premier finally admit that she has created this health care crisis?We didn't have to end up here, Speaker. But there is hope. An NDP Government will fix it. Will this Premier finally admit that she has created this health care crisis?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, it's two months since I became the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. And I have had the privilege of visiting health care facilities of all types across this province in the two months. And I can tell this House that Ontario should be proud of the health care system that we currently v.we know we have more to do. We are intent on improving the system. But we have built a system that is doing an incredible job of keeping our loved ones safe, healthy and well. Our life expectancy from male to female now is 65 higher than the national average. It's one of the highest in the oecd. When we look at hospital deaths, cancer outcomes, avoidable deaths compared to other provinces, compared to other developed countries, we are in the top level of health care systems. We have one of the lowest rate of potential -- Years of life lost. I want to thank yet again all the health professionals across this province who are doing an amazing job. To keep Ontarians healthy.

MPP MacLeod to Minister Sousa Re: AG Pre-Election Report

>> MPP Lisa MacLeod: Good morning, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of finance. The Liberals were caught yesterday with a secret hidden ledger of the government finances that proved that they have doubled their deficit overnight from \$6.7 million to \$11.7 billion. The auditor was very clear that their sneaky way of budgeting is costing Ontario families over \$100,000 if it's a family of four. That's \$23,000 in debt now and over \$26,000 per person in 2021. And a reminder, Speaker, that this is up from the \$11,000 when they took office. Ontarians are telling us that they can't afford this Liberal government any more heir waste and mismanagement and the massive distrust of this government because they do not feel there is value for their tax dollar. Will the Minister of finance finally admit that the emperor has no clothes and that that government has run out of people's money?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, again we thank the auditor general for the report and we recognize the auditor general made very clear that all the assumptions the government put forward was cautious and were reasonable. Two items are in dispute. Between professional accountants. Not with the government of Ontario but with other accounting firms and professional accounting systems. She's arguing and has for some time that the pension act should be amended notwithstandingth fact that those very same principles have been adhered to for the past 20rs, Mr. Speaker. And now on the second point, we are taking \$1.5 billion off the tax base to support reductions in our reductions of electricity costs, especially for the rural communities. Then another proportionate amount. Coming off the rate base to amortize that asset. The auditor general feels that shouldn't be done that way. Yet every other rate regulated system allows for it, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP MacLeod: The fact is there's only O auditor and she said that your projections are not reasonable. She also said the presumption is created that the government has more money than it actually does. There's only one auditor and this is the government, let me remind you, that brought in the single largest sales tax increase in Ontario's history with the H.S.T. Brought in the single largest income tax history in the Ontario history with the health tax. They brought in the single largest

environmental tax in the province with the eco tax only to be eclipsed with their cap-and-trade program. All along these revenues E gone into general revenues, not to specific programs, and yet they still have an \$11.7 billion dollar deficit using other people's money. Speaker, Ontarians cannot afford the Liberals any more and they simply cannot trust them either. So will the finance Minister stand in his place and tell us what else he is hiding in the books or does Doug Ford have to come in and do it for him?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, now the member is questioning the auditor once again. The fact of the matter, the auditor has reaffirmed all the principles are operating appropriately, and all the accounting is in fact accurate. What she's saying is she would prefer that the fair hydro plan come off the tax base not the rate base. We made a policy decision, by government, to support the ratepayers, reduce the cost of electricity and amortize it over a longer period of time, which is allowed, Mr. Speaker. And is provided by deloitte, provided by KPMG and e&y. And the auditor goes further -- the books of O.P.G., which is carrying this debt, she acknowledges that it's transparent, that it's there to be seen. She acknowledges that the clean audit by e&y is accurate and she affirms it, Mr. Speaker. What's being hidden are the cuts that that member and her party are about to do to the people of Ontario. We're going to grow our economy and we're going to continue on our fiscal track to balance and make sure --

MPP Armstrong to Minister Jaczek Re: Long-Term Care Homes

>> MPP Teresa Armstrong: Speaker, my question's for the Premier. Carol contacted my office. She told us her husband is forced to live in long-term care because he can't get the care he needs. And she's concerned for his health. It is steadily deteriorating. But he is still not getting enough therapy. His P.S.W. Can only help him with his exercises if there's enough time left over after his basic care is completed. And with only six to eight minutes per session, that just never happens. Carol's husband needs more hands-on care. After 15 years in office, why has this Premier failed to legislate the minimum standard, four hours of hands on care, that long-term care residents and people like Carol's husband desperately needs?

>> Minister Helena Jaczek: Require our long-term-care facilities to ensure that each individual patient in their care receives the appropriate level of support that they need. And, in particular of course, we have continued to invest in long-term care in our most recent budget, of course, we are investing an additional \$300 million over three years to increase staffing in long-term care. This is driven by our analysis of the patient, the clientele that are actually in long-term-care facilities, Mr. Speaker. They are aging. They have complex conditions. It's a good thing of course that people are living longer. Our life expectancy has increased. We need to obviously address those conditions that go with aging and we're doing this on an individual basis on the analysis done by our Ihins, in a thoroughly appropriate way. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Armstrong: Speaker, Carol and her husband tried to avoid long-term care but they live in a rural area. Like so many rural Ontarians, they can't get the home care they need. They looked into retirement homes and assistive living to meet his needs but at the cost of \$8,000 per month, it's simply unaffordable. So he was force today live in long-term care, and he could spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair because he's not getting the physio that he needs. It is simply unacceptable. It shouldn't have to be this way, and no one in Ontario should have to live like this. Why is this Premier left people like Carol's husband without the access to care that they need?

>> Minister Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, no one is admitted to a long-term-care home unless they qualify for that degree of assistance. So I would question the member opposite's pre O her question. In addition to the \$300 million over three years, what this actually means that every long-term-care home in the province will benefit from an additional registered nurse. This is part of our commitment to increasing the hours of care each resident receives to a provincial average of four hours per resident per day. This is based on an individual need for each individual patient, carefully assessed by the long-term care facility. And so this is going to mean an additional 15 million hours of nursing, personal support and therapeutic care for our loved ones living in long-

term care. We will continue to remain responsive to the residents' individual needs for care. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Martins to Minister Leal Re: Employing Young Talent Incentive

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Minister responsible for small business. Davenport is made up mostly of small businesses, and making sure that Ontario has a competitive business climate where businesses can grow and compete is important to me and I know it's important for this government as well. From reducing the small business tax rate by 22% to saving businesses millions by reducing red tape, the numbers don't lie. Ontario has created over 821,000 jobs since the recession and our unemployment rate is the lowest it has been in almost two decades. But the summer season is fast approaching and we have heard from some small business owners that they face some challenges when trying to hire young people. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister please tell us. What this government is doing to help lower costs for small businesses when hiring and retaining youth?

>> Minister Jeff Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Davenport for the question this morning. Mr. Speaker, exactly two weeks ago I had the pleasure to announcement employment -- the employment young talent incentive withminister hunter in my riding of Peterborough. This is investment of \$124 million over three years that not only helps business hire and retain youth aged 15 too 19 but also provides an opportunity for local businesses to provide good jobs for young people like Amanda gurney, an employee of morel's in Peterborough that I shop at every week. Businesses that hire and retain young employees through the employment service and youth job connection program can receive up to \$2,000. Mr. Speaker, we know that that's a smart investment. In fact since the inactive officially launched in January, nearly 70 young people in my riding have been hired at various local businesses in my riding. Smart and strategic investments like these are what will ensure small business can continue to create local jobs in every corner of Ontario.

>> MPP Martins: So thank you, Minister, for your answer. It's clear that this government is committed to delivering results for businesses and communities, that we are choosing to make strategic investments in programs that boost economic growth and help Ontario families. Because we know that cutting important programs and incentives would be the most irresponsible thing to do. Small businesses play an important role in my riding of Davenport and really, Speaker, across all communities in Ontario. And we're delivering on our commitments like eliminating fees on government opportunities and designating 33% of government procurement to small businesses. Mr. Speaker, this is only a fraction of what this government is Doi andas done. Will theinister please tell us more about other initiatives this government has taken to lower costs for small businesses?

>> Minister Leal: Thank you. I want to thank the member from Davenport for the supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Those who believe in cutting corporate tax also save small businesses money. We know the only ones benefiting from big corporate tax cuts are big corporations. We're making smart investments that will actually save small business owners time and money. The world of business is changing. We're making sure that entrepreneurs and small business owners have the skills and tools to complete. We recently announced a \$12 million. Our main street digital initiative to help small businesses across main streets in Ontario compete and grow. Businesses can receive up to \$2,500 in grants to help them with their digital transformation as they -- just yesterday I had the opportunity to visit St. Catharines, Ontario, with my good friend the member to take a stroll down St. Paul street on main street in St. Catharines. I couldn't believe t.store to store to small business to small business they actually told me things are booming in St. Catharines today. They couldn't believe it. And then, Mr. Speaker, they said they don't understand the doom and gloom from the opposite side of the House when business is booming in every part of Ontario, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Jones to Minister Naqvi Re: Justice of the Peace Appointments

>> MPP Sylvia Jones: My question is to the Premier. Last night the government posted a news release announcing 17 new justice of the peace appointments. Moments later the news release was deleted and removed from the archives. Why the secrecy?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate the question. I will look into why the news release was removed. We have appointed 17 new justices of the peace. As the member opposite knows that we have a very strong, independent process to appoint justices of the peace through our justice of the peace advisory committee, O known as Jack, which does all the posting and interviews and recommendations, independent of the government. It may be that maybe that one or two people were not informed who had been -- who had been appointed as justice of the peace and that's why the release was removed. But I undertake to get back to the member and get the reason behind this.

>> MPP Jones: Or maybe that some of the people who were appointed have too close ties to the Liberal government. We know -- Will the Premier -- today, table those 17 justice of the peace appointees and let the people decide whether there is a connection that needs to be further explored?

>> Minister Naqvi: Speaker, I'm not surprised that the member opposite will go in that direction. I'm really assuming there is a human error that's involved. I can assure the member, as the Attorney General, I take my responsibility very, very seriously in appointing the most highest of the highest calibre of individuals to serve as our judges and justice of peace. These people are -- I've been actually at events with the judiciary, with our lawyers in our great province, and one of the compliments I continue to hear is the quality and the calibre of individuals who serve as our judges and justice of peace. We have an extremely strong independent process by which judges and justices of the peace are appointed. I can assure you I am absolutely confident that when you will see those 17 names, you will realize. How competent they are. I don't know what the technical reasons why the news release is down. I will make sure that news release is up as soon as possible.

MPP Natyshak to Minister Sousa Re: Horse Racing Industry

>> MPP Taras Natyshak: Thanks, Speaker. My question is to the Premier, Speaker. In 2012, the Liberal government suddenly and unilaterally decide today kill the highly successful slots-at-racetracks programme. Since then we have seen the destruction of one horse racing breeding industry that supplied 65,000 good rural jobs in Ontario. A couple weeks ago horse people on smaller tracks were blindsided again after the government announced that it had offered a long-term funding deal negotiated between the O.L.G., Ontario racing and the private for-profit woodbine entertainment group. Speaker, why didn't the Premier properly consult horse people in smaller tracks on this deal that will determine the future of horse racing in Ontario for generations to come?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you for the question. It gives me great pleasure to reaffirm what it is that we are doing with regards to the horse racing. We have now concluded \$105 million 19-year contract to enable the horse racing industry to have funding. We're enhancing what's called the enhancements horse improvement program incentive year over year by omafra. New racetrack sustainability innovation fund of 6 million over three years to support those smaller tracks and expanded source of revenue. We have an additional funding arrangement supplement with the racetracks that may be experiencing financial shortfalls which enables long-term decisions in the racing community. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, we're providing a new board. The Ontario racing board, which actually will oversee the funding improvements and enabling the service provider to be determined. On that board will be small tracks and horse people, horsemen, Mr. Speaker, to ensure everybody is properly represented.

>> MPP Natyshak: Speaker, the Minister of finance's answer is exactly what we're concerned about. This is what the problem is. Speaker, when Greg Walling, the government's special advisor on the horse racing industry, resigned last fall, he had a warning for the Premier. He said, quote -- beware of woodbine's dominant position. In the proposed structures of administration, not only are they the

player. They are the score keeper and the referee. The Premier ignored this warning and handed over a near monopoly control of horse racing to this private for-profit corporation. Not only that, she's forcing horse people and tracks to decide by May 1st whether to sign off this lopsided agreement. Speaker, will the Premier withdraw this rushed deadline and take the time to listen to the concerns of horse people in smaller tracks in rural Ontario?

>> Minister Sousa: Speaker, that's exactly what we're doing. We're ensuring that we have representation on the board. We're ensuring that their voices are heard. We're ensuring that there is no oversight or monopoly on one racetrack over another. We're giving them the opportunity so that they are enabling themselves to be heard and make the appropriate decisions to fund ongoing base, Mr. Speaker. That is the purpose of having that oversight prior to giving the service provider the ability to make those changes. Furthermore woodbine has declining receipt over time as the industry gets stronger. We need to support the small horse tracks. We need to support the horse people and horsemen, and we have met with all of the --

MPP Potts to Minister Del Duca Re: Manufacturing Sector Investments

>> MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Minister of economic development and growth. Speaker, we've been hearing a great deal of late about jobs, specifically manufacturing jobs and Ontario's growing economy. We all know that during the last recession, many countries lost manufacturing jobs. For example between 2007 and 2010, the United States lost 2.3 million manufacturing jobs. We also know that between 2007 and 2009, real manufacturing output US fell by 10.3%. So in France and Britain, Australia, many countries, Speaker, including Canada, the story was similar. And with few exceptions the global manufacturing sector was hit hard by the recession everywhere. We know, Speaker, Ontario's economy has been adding jobs steadily for the last years and that in overall jobs we've more than bounced back from this recession. Speaker, the leader of the opposition calls our target investments in Ontario businesses corporate well fair and he vows to cancel these programs. My question is simple. Will the Minister please tell us how our strategic investments in manufacturing has helped that sector?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I want to begin by thanking the member for Beaches- East York for being such an extraordinary champion for the people that I know he's honoured to represent. He is right, Speaker. He is 100% right. Province of Ontario not unlike most other places around the world was hit hard by the global economic recession. About ten years ago in 2008. Unfortunately, Speaker, the alternative version of events or facts that the opposition, particularly in recent weeks, have put forward to the people is simply not reflective of what took place, because the opposition likes to pretend that the millions of manufacturing jobs were lost south of the border and around the world, frankly, that what happened here in Ontario was unique, Speaker. Of course it wasn't. But here's what's critically important for the people of this province to know and understand. I can assure you that they do. Our province has created more than 820,000 net new jobs over the last ten years since the depth of that recession. Speaker, the fact is also, since that recession. Ontario manufacturing specifically employment has increased by 40,000, and in the last year alone, we in this province have added more than 15,000. Manufacturing jobs, Speaker. That's more than many of our other --

>> MPP Potts: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of course for that incredible answer and his unwavering support for the manufacturing sector in Ontario. It's important to hear about the successes of our workers and our initiatives that this government is taking in these sectors. The manufacturing sector is diverse, something that we on this side of the House know very well. But I believe the opposition seems to forget. From the auto sector in Windsor, Oakville and beyond to advanced manufacturing in Welland or the steel sector in Sault Ste. Marie and food processing, Speaker, in my own riding of Beaches- East York, this government has ensured that the manufacturing sector continues to grow. And while it is said -- instead the opposition's trying to trick Ontario workers and investors and our competitors into believing that our people are failing, we know, Speaker, that since the Minister has just explained we are actually adding manufacturing jobs across the province. In fact we are leaders in manufacturing employment. Speaker, will Minister

tell us more about what this government is doing to ensure our manufacturing sector remains strong?

>> Minister Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I thank the member from Beaches for the follow-up question. I want to continue with the story I was telling a second ago. Since that 2008 recession, manufacturing jobs here in Ontario have increased by almost 11%, Speaker. We have delivered amongst the most competitive corporate income tax rate in Canada, which the United States is simply now catching up to, Speaker. Because our government is a very strong partner for all manufacturers, since 2004, Speaker, our government has announced over \$2 billion in supports specifically for Ontario manufacturers helping to create and retain over 100,000 jobs in every corner of Ontario. The workers of this province and the employers of this province, Speaker, have been waiting to hear opposition parties that are prepared to stand up for them. Fight for them and be on their side. So far, Speaker, they have not heard that from either opposition party but they have confidence that we will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with them.

MPP Bailey to Minister Ballard Re: Otter Creek Wind Farm

>> MPP Bob Bailey: Thank you, Speaker. Nice to be here. Premier, my question's to the Premier. Premier, residents in Sarnia- Lambton are concerned their drinking water is being put at risk by the development of 12 industrial turbines along the Chatham- Kent St. Clair township border. St. Clair township council has determined the otter creek wind turbine development just outside the township border is a potential threat to the area aquifer many residents in St. Clair township draw their water from. Asking for protection of the water well system be included in the mandate of the Thames reg source water protection committee. Premier, will you listen to the St. Clair township council and make sure these wells are protected from contamination?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: With all concerns around wind turbines, and I understand the passion with which those who live in the area have their concerns about wind turbines. But I will say, Speaker, as with all wind turbine projects, we take the concerns regarding the environment and human health exceptionally seriously. So let me say at the beginning that my ministry adheres to a very strict renewable energy approvals process, and I know, Speaker, that, you know, the members opposite and the P.C. Party have never approved a single renewable energy project evehat we speak of or never spoken in support of any of those here in this House. Our government is committed to a cleaner, greener future, a reduction in the use of fossil fuels, Speaker. But we do take these concerns very seriously. I'll have more in supplementary.

>> MPP Bailey: Speaker, my question's back to the Premier again. Premier, the construction of the otter creek turbine project will involve deep plow driving into the same black shale that left 20 water wells in the Chatham- Kent area producing nothing but murky Brown liquid. I know the Minister knows about this. The residents of St. Clair township are understandably concerned. Your government has the opportunity to do the right thing, cancel this project before the aquifer that supplies the residents with water is put at risk of contamination. Premier, will your government do the right thing, cancel the otter creek turbine project today?

>> Minister Ballard: Well, Speaker, I'll start by reiterate rating what I said at the very outset, that our government takes these concerns, the concerns of residents in this area very seriously, and we take the environment and the impacts of these types of developments, the impacts to human health very seriously as well. And again, you know, Speaker any project as it goes forward, any renewable energy project that moves forward, goes through a very rigorous evaluation process by my ministry to make sure that the health of the residents in the area, the health of the environment is protected. And this project as well will undergo and is undergoing those procedures, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Gates to Minister Naqvi Re: Hydro One Exec Salary

>> MPP Wayne Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, we both know outrageous hydro bills are the norm here in Ontario. To make matters worse, since the Liberals privatized hydro, the Hydro One C.E.O. Mayo Schmidt is making over \$6 million a year while people in this province struggle to pay their hydro bills, buy groceries, get prescription medicine and go to the dentist. This Liberal government continues to stand behind Hydro One C.E.O. Mayo Schmidt. They think that his salary is reasonable. I think that is a disgrace and so do the people of Ontario. Speaker, when will the Premier make the right decision and bring Hydro One back into public hands, where it belongs, and put a stop, put a stop to those ridiculous executive salaries?

>> Minister Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'm glad to stand up and speak on behalf of the Minister of energy on this important issue. I think the member opposite, Speaker, knows that we are taking every step possible to ensure that the hydro rates, the electricity rates are coming down. Our fair hydro plan has resulted in a 25% decrease on average for all -- for all residents across -- and businesses and farms across the province. And in fact, Speaker, in rural and remote areas, that discount, that reduction is in some instances around 50%. These reductions are taking place because of the concerted effort that our government has made in making sure that we have an electricity system that is affordable, but also, Speaker, a system that is clean, that is a system that does not burn -- burns coal like the way it used to under the government -- under the previous Conservative and the NDP Governments. But ensures that we have got clean air, a clean emission-free system which is -- Available to Ontarians at an affordable price.

>> MPP Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Premier. No C.E.O. Of Hydro One should be paid \$6 million when people are struggling to pay their hydro bill. The NDP is trying to put a cap on public sector C.E.O. Salaries in the past many times through legislation. Unfortunately this government, along with the P.C.S., voted against several pieces of legislation to cap public sector C.E.O. Salaries. Speaker, we know P.C.S. are more interested in helping millionaires instead of the people that have continued to pay their hydro bill or eat. When will the Premier start caring about the people struggling to pay their bills in this province instead of supporting millionaires, millionaires on Bay Street?

>> Minister Naqvi: Speaker, the Premier is the only leader in this province that has actually taken concrete steps to reduce electricity bills by 25% for Ontarians, small businesses and farmers. NDP's, Speaker, hydro pamphlet is short on details but long on promises. Many of their promises rely on a way yet to be determined expert panel, to be convened sometime in the future. That is not going to save Ontarians a single penny on their bills, Speaker. And they're facing their -- basing their calculations on pie in the sky negotiations with the federal government. Speaker, the reality is that these proposals don't make sense. Their biggest idea, buy more than \$4 billion worth of Hydro One shares will not take one cent off electricity bills. It will take zero cents off electricity bills, Speaker. All it does. Stock market money that should be used for health care, education and infrastructure. We don't agree with their plan.

MPP Fraser to Minister Flynn Re: Workplace Safety

>> MPP John Fraser: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of labour. Minister, we're joined by people across this province, across Canada and around the world in recognizing the day of mourning. Together we pause to remember those workers who have lost their lives or been injured on the job. They're our families, our friends and our Neighbours. We should honour their skill, dedication and commitment by making sure all those who follow have safer workplaces. Minister, I believe everyone in this House agrees that safety should be the number one priority in every workplace and on every job site. One injury is one too many. Every Ontarian should be able to go to work confident they will return home safe and sound at the end of the day. Minister, can you please tell us what we are doing to improve workplace safety?

>> Minister Kevin Flynn: Thank you and thank you to the member for this very important question, Speaker. The day of mourning is one of the most important days of the year for me as Minister of labour, but I think for all members of this House, Speaker. And I hope members will take the

opportunity to attend some of the services that will be held around the province, Speaker. As Minister of labour, anybody that's been the Minister of labour will know, Speaker, the Minister gets notified each and every time that a worker is killed on the job in this province, Speaker, or is seriously injured. It's the worst part of the job and it never gets easier. But each time, Speaker, it reminds me of the most important part of our jobs here, making sure that above all else, workers in this province are kept safe, Speaker. We brought forward mandatory health and safety training for all workers including yng workers, Speaker, those new to the workplace. Strengthen protections for temporary health workers through bill 148 and we're improving the support we give to those who are injured, Speaker, by improving wsib benefits. Speaker, as a result of this Ontario's become one of the safest places in the entire world in which you can work, Speaker. We should be proud of that progress, Speaker, but not satisfied for one minute.

>> MPP Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. This morning we all dond yellow and black ribbons to commemorate the day of mourning. I hope that we will all continue to wear them through the weekend. The black represents mourning and the yellow represents hope for a safer and brighter future. A future where there are no injuries and where everyone returns home safe at the end of every day. This weekend people across this province will gather at ceremonies in their communities. Flags will be lowered to honour loved ones, co-workers and friends we've lost. No job is worth a life. No job is worth an injury. When it comes to health and safety, we all have a role to play. We all have a responsibility. Speaker, I'll be joined the Ottawa district labour council at Vincent Massey park this weekend for their ceremony. Through you to the Minister, can the Minister tell us how he will be commemorating this weekend the day of mourning?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, thank you. Thank you to the member from Ottawa south, Speaker. This weekend I'll be joining Ontario families at local day of mourning ceremonies both in front of the wsib, Speaker, and also at home in Oakville. I'd urge all members to do the same thing, Speaker. This day of mourning ceremonies held around the provinces. You can go online to get the information. Find where the ceremony is at and join those, Speaker, in honouring all those who have been lost or injured on the job. Because, Speaker, I know workplace safety is not an issue that should be divided along party lines. I think we can all in this House agree THA workplace deaths and injuries are tragic. They're unacceptable and they're preventable, Speaker. We should all work together to make workplace safety a personal priority, to speak to your constituents, your families and your friends. If we work together, Speaker, we can ensure our loved ones and our communities know their rights and understand how to pro tech themselves. If we all work together to change society's attitude, and we should not rest, Speaker, until safety is regarded as routine. Same as a seat belt in a car, Speaker

MPP Walker to Minister Leal Re: Wildlife Damage Compensation Program

>> MPP Bill Walker: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of agriculture food and rural affairs. It's been almost five months since you said you would review and fix compensation program. Yet today farmers across Ontario continue to face huge losses because the program you put in place isn't working. I've personally witnessed and written to you about farmers like Wayne cawhill in my riding of Bruce- Grey Owen Sound. You've heard from respected farm groups, municipalities and individuals who wrote and spoke to you urging you to fix this mess. Minister, why are you holding up farmers' compensation?

>> Minister Jeff Leal: I want to thank my friend, the Honourable member, for his question this morning. Indeed, when I had the opportunity to intraes -- address the annual meeting, the Ontario federation of agriculture, we made a commitment to look at the wildlife compensation program. I had the opportunity, as I do, you know, visiting concessions in Ontario, certainly in my riding of Peterborough, I've been in the fields. I've seen the damage that's been done. Coyotes attacking calves and fishers attacking young lambs. So we put a process in place to dot review. We reached out to significantly the ofa, Christian farmers of Ontario, national farmers union. We've developed a consensus on a path forward and we're going to start the im -- implementation process. And part of that will be to train the evaluators in municipalities right across the province of Ontario so they have

a standard skill set when they're going into the fields to ascertain damage from predators.

>> MPP Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Minister. Minister, you have over a year's worth of evidence and complaints about the Ontario wildlife damage compensation program. You know the program is failing and not achieving its intended goal. One in five claims for predation kills is rejected by your staff. 20%. They don't visit the farm. They are not doing groundwork. When farmers call the hot line to lodge a complaint, sadly some of them have been hung up on. Your inaction is inexcusable. Our party and specifically our ag credit ic for Haldimand- Norfolk pressed you for answers on the same question just last Christmas. Five months later you're still holding up farmers' compensation. It's time for you, Minister, to get down to hard work and fix this mess. I ask when will you give farmers their entitled compensation?

>> Minister Leal: Well, Mr. Speaker, contrary to the information that was just provided by the member there, we want to make sure that we have all our evaluators to have a consistent standard skill set right across the province of Ontario, to go into the field as I have, to look at the remains of carcasses from predator issues within rural Ontario. We've consulted widely with Keith Currie of OFA, the national farmers union. Interesting their review is slightly different to the narrative that may be provided by the member here today, is they're very pleased, Mr. Speaker, with the progress that were being made. We're looking at ways to actually increase compensation, particularly for those animals that have unique genetics to make sure farmers are compensated. There's a consensus building. They've indicated to us we're on the right path to get this resolved.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Naidoo-Harris Re: French High School in East Toronto

>> MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, the francophone community in east Toronto has been pushing for an école secondaire Franco phone for over a decade. Recently they -- recently they learned the former Greenwood school in the Toronto District School Board. Because of the small footprint of the existing building with no adjacent school yard there's no green space for students. Parents are concerned that a lack of equivalence with English schools, that have many acres of green space and better facilities, will result in ongoing assimilation of the next generation of francophone students. What will you do, Minister, to ensure that a fully equivalent francophone high school, with dedicated green spaces for the students, is delivered to this community?

>> Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for this question. Our government is absolutely committed to supporting both French and English school boards across the province to build better schools. In fact since 2013, we have provided \$208 million in capital funding to C.S. Viamonde. In this time C.S. Viamonde has completed 25 projects including eight new schools and 17 additions and retrofits. In fact we recently announced this year we're providing \$80 million, including more than 16 million to be invested in the Viamonde school board to support the creation of a new French high school in Toronto. This school will become the fourth public French language high school in Toronto, and it is absolutely a very important move for the community and by the school board.