

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Thursday, October 19, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period

41st Parliament, 2nd Session

Thursday, October 19, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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PC Leader Brown to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro-Rate Reduction Plan

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. According to the scathing auditor general's report, the Minister -- ministry of energy signed a contract with the retainer of \$500,000 to receive help from a law firm to provide services and to compile emails before providing them to us. At the same time they completed the special report. The ministry has still not provided us with all the emails from the auditor general's office. Those emails were requested on may 31st, 2017. I can appreciate the frustration of the auditor general. Mr. Speaker, Premier authorize or instruct the Minister of energy to block or delay the release of those emails, or did the Minister obstruct the auditor general on his own decision?

>>Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government remains committed to being open and transparent and continues to co-operate with the office of the auditor general. For example, Mr. Speaker, the independent electricity system operator has so far provided 1,200 records to the auditor general. Ontario power generation has provided hundreds of records, Mr. Speaker. The Ontario financing

authority has provided 3,242 records. Treasury board, thousands every records. And as of yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I explained that, as of October 13th, the ministry has provided 13,212 records to the office of the auditor general. In this process, Mr. Speaker, and throughout our everyday operations, we're adhering to all document retention standards. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the ministry is continuing to release additional information to the auditor general. In fact committed to providing all additional records to the auditor by November 1st. The ministry has been regularly providing the auditor general's office with additional documents each week and will continue.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. The question was who ordered the obstruction? Was it the Premier's office or was it the Minister of energy's own decision? The Minister said that he released 13,000 emails to the auditor general. However he still went out and got some high-priced help for this apparent obstruction. In fact the half a million dollars consulting firm and his office originally identified some 2 million emails. That means he released less than 1%. That's actually .65% of the identified emails. We released 1% of our emails to the auditor general. That's not good enough, Mr. Speaker. Less than 1%. That's not transparent. That's a government that's engaged in obstruction. So, Mr. Speaker, my question is very straightforward to the Premier herself. Will the Premier release the other 99% of the emails and –to the auditor general.

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again we had 80 custodians identified capturing 40 phrases, Mr. Speaker, that provided over 2 million emails. None of those -- not all of those emails, Mr. Speaker, applied to this actual document and to this request, Mr. Speaker. But really, when we're looking at what was being done with the fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, it was giving families what they had asked for, real and immediate relief on their electricity bills, and that's what we delivered, Mr. Speaker. We made a policy choice to ensure that we continue to have a clean, reliable and affordable --Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, we made the policy choice to ensure that we continue to have a clean, reliable and affordable electricity system. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, we made the policy choice to ensure that we continue to have a clean, reliable and affordable electricity system. For ratepayers of today and ratepayers of tomorrow.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, for a third time, directly to the Premier. The half-a-million-dollar consultants have had since may 31st to get these emails to the auditor general. That's 141 days and counting. I'm sure Peter Faist works his email magic a lot quicker than that and it only costs \$10,000. Mr. Speaker, I agree with the auditor general. This is an offensive obstruction of the rights of the auditor general, and every single member of this legislature. Mr. Speaker -- One more day is one too many. So my question, Mr. Speaker, directly to the Premier -- I hope that she will answer this herself rather than passing the buck. Will she have those emails boxed up and sent over to the auditor general before another one of her Liberal cronies has a chance to double delete them? Exposure. Will she release the other 99% of emails on this very serious matter?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Talking about days, we know it's almost 365 days that they've said that they would release a plan on what they would do with the electricity sector, Mr. Speaker, and they have done nothing. Let's look at what we have done, Mr. Speaker. We've lowered electricity bills by 25% for all residential customers and as many as a half a million small businesses and farms, and I know the parties opposite have yet to even present a credible plan. Families in this province asked for real and immediate relief and that's what we've delivered, Mr. Speaker. The fair hydro plan is providing that 25% reduction to all residential ratepayers and guarantees that we're going to keep the costs will not rise beyond the rate of inflation for the next four years. Mr. Speaker, electricity rates had risen too much too fast, and as a result of this investments that we've made in our electricity system, which have become unreliable. With Brownouts and blackouts, the fair hydro plan makes sure, with the investments that we made, that we've made made it clean, reliable and affordable, Mr. Speaker. With Brownouts and blackouts, the fair hydro plan makes sure, with the investments that we made, that we've made made it clean, reliable and affordable, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro-Rate Reduction Plan

>>MPP Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Premier, Speaker. The Premier rode in on a white horse. She touted her open government. She loudly exclaimed that let's do things differently. And then her speech from the throne, quote, the plan to open up government -- With increased transparency and more accountability. And ever since then they -- Speaker, she made all these promises. Ever since then, she's respected the independent officers of the legislature. She's thrown open the books for the independent officers to look at. She's followed the rules and she's respected the law. Kidding. She hasn't done any of that. She's actually made up her own rules. She's made up her own rules. She's actually removed oversight from the officers of the legislature. Mr. Speaker, what happened to this Premier saying she was going to do things differently?

>>Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know when my Honourable friend rises and talks about all of the great things that our Premier continues to do, he was starting off on the right path, Mr. Speaker. But the only party that is seen as a party that's kidding with the people of Ontario is the party opposite, Mr. Speaker. That party will do one thing and then say another every single week, Mr. Speaker. They talk about bringing forward a plan on electricity and then say oh, wait. No, that will come next week. No, wait. That will come next month. Now it's going to happen in some magical weekend in November. But we know, Mr. Speaker, they have no plan. They have no idea on what to do to help the people of Ontario. Just for example, Mr. Speaker, not even when it comes to electricity. Let's talk about minimum wage. First in the first reading, Mr. Speaker, they vote in favour of helping all low-income people in this province. Then when it came to voting on the bill yesterday, Mr. Speaker, where were they? Nowhere Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's really a shame that the Premier won't actually answer these questions about her lack of openness and transparency that she promised. We're talking about a brand-new \$4 billion scandal here on this so-called fair hydro plan. This is going to cost billions of dollars, taxpayers and electricity customers billions. It's starting to look like an episode of the Simpsons over there. Where are they going to find this \$4 billion? A case of duff's beer or Lisa's saxophone or grandpa Simpson's drawer? Who's running the show over there? Is it Homer Simpson or is it Ed Clark? We have the members of the eastern Ontario warden's caucus who are here. They're looking for much needed infrastructure dollars. How far would this \$4 billion go to answering the needs in our local communities? But it's not going there, Mr. Speaker. When will the Premier just stand up and she cease made an enormous mistake on this scheme? Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now I know, Mr. Speaker, that the fair hydro plan is reducing everyone in this province their bills by 25%, Mr. Speaker. That's something that we should all be proud of because we recognize that we spent money in infrastructure rebuilding this system. \$70 billion, Mr. Speaker. But when you want to talk about infrastructure bills, I know that the Minister of infrastructure, even the Minister of transportation can talk over and over again, Mr. Speaker, about all the infrastructure that we're building right across the province. But let me start talking a little bit about the infrastructure. \$13.5 billion in the GTA go regional express rail. It's going to quadruple the number of weekly trips to 6,000. 5.3 billion Eglinton Crosstown L.R.T. \$1 billion in the ring of fire tripling the Ontario community infrastructure fund to \$300 million. \$1.4 billion in the Hurontario L.R.T.. 1 billion in Ottawa's L.R.T. 43 million in the Waterloo regional transit hub and I haven't even started on northern Ontario.

>>MPP Smith: Thanks, Speaker. It's amazing to me that the Premier doesn't want to answer these questions, because we're talking about a lack of openness and transparency that she promised here, and this scandal is costing us \$4 billion. And they haven't released all of the documents. They haven't released the emails. In all seriousness, the fact that they haven't released all of the emails given what happened during the gas plant scandal, Speaker, is absurd much it's an egregious breach of trust by this government. They stonewalled an F.O.I. Saying no records exist and now they play the waiting game trying to outlast the public's right to see the government's backroom dealings. Speaker, I'll provide the boxes. All they have to do is take those emails, put them in the boxes. As a matter of fact, I still have the boxes from the gas plant scandal. I'll send those boxes over and they can put the emails in those boxes. Just turn over the boxes and do the right thing

>>Minister Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, so let's be clear on one thing, Mr. Speaker. All of the boxes that they have on that side are usually filled with something else, Mr. Speaker, and it's not something that we really

want to smell. But the one thing I can talk about here, Mr. Speaker, is that we've made sure -- we've made sure that we've put 80 custodians, 40 access words, Mr. Speaker, and we have come up with 2 million documents. Those 2 million documents were went through by our law firm and they identified 145,000 emails. Those 145,000 emails, Mr. Speaker, are now being gone through by the ministry of energy, making sure that we can provide to the auditor general as many emails as possible. And that has been 13,212 by October 13th. And you know what, Mr. Speaker ? We're going to make sure that she has all of those documents by November 1st.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro-Rate Reduction Plan

>>MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the Premier. This week we learned that the Premier and her Liberal government are forcing Ontarians to pay an extra \$4 billion to hide the devastating effects of their \$40 billion hydro borrowing scheme from the public. But that's not the only thing that they're hiding. The auditor general's report says that based on the email correspondence her office looked at, the Liberals knew what the costs would be. They had other options. They were advised to take those other options, and still they stuck Ontario families with \$4 billion bill anyway. Will the Premier tell the people of Ontario, did she personally green-light this accounting trick, knowing it would cost families \$4 billion on their hydro bills?

>>Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased once again to rise and answer questions on this and of course talk about the fair hydro plan as well. But let's first talk about the accounting. The government's financial statements are prepared in accordance with the public sector accounting standards and will continue to follow these standards for the transactions resulting from the fair hydro plan in the 2017 and 18 years and of course, Mr. Speaker, in future years. In regards to the rate regulation --Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So Does not prohibit the use of rate regular accounting, Mr. Speaker. So many entities in Canada, including O.P.G., Toronto hydro, fortis, Hydro One. Use rate accounting as well. In fact six of eight independent system operators across North America use rate regulating accounting and I'll get more to supplementary.

>>MPP Tabun: Speaker, I kind of hope the Premier will get to the supplementary. The a.g.'s report says that emails show senior government officials were warned of the cost of this plan and were told there were other options. Since the Premier refuses to release the emails of the A.G. Examiner in her investigation, can she tell us who were the senior government officials that were warned?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I get to rise and speak about our fair hydro plan. You know, Mr. Speaker, families in the province asked for real and immediate relief on their electricity bills and that's what we delivered. The fair hydro plan is providing an average of 25% to residential ratepayers. That's a cut, Mr. Speaker. And guarantees that electricity rates will not rise beyond the rate of inflation for four years and as many as half a million small businesses and farms are also benefitting. But we all knew, Mr. Speaker, that electricity rates risen too much too fast as a result of the investments that we made \$70 billion. And so that meant that we were paying off those investments too quickly. So the fair hydro plan smooths out the costs of those investments but over a longer period of time. And that means the system improvements are paid for by the people that use now the system now and of course use the system later, Mr. Speaker .And that's fair, because this plan makes sure that we also keep all of these assets on the electricity side with the ratepayer where they should be, Mr. Speaker .

>>MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the Premier. The people of Ontario deserve to know who authorized this extra \$4 billion on their hydro bills. Yesterday I moved a motion to require these emails to be released publicly. The Liberals used their majority to shut down debate on that motion. The Premier has already set aside \$500,000 for a lawyer to organize these emails for the A.G.. It should be easy to release them now to the public. Will she?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've provided 13,212 emails to the auditor general and will make sure all of the emails that apply to this file we'll provide it to the auditor general by November 1st. We're constantly working, Mr. Speaker, with the auditor general's office and in constant contact with the office, Mr. Speaker. But let's take one step back and be very clear, Mr. Speaker. This decision with the fair hydro plan was a policy choice, a choice to ensure that we continue to have a clean, safe, reliable and affordable electricity system for the ratepayers of today and the ratepayers of tomorrow and the fair hydro plan keeps the cost of borrowing within the rate base, Mr. Speaker, not the tax base, because that's the logical and right thing to do. Electricity financing should remain within the electricity system. While the auditor general is welcome to her opinion, Mr. Speaker. Our plan has been approved by her peers at KPMG, Ian White and Deloitte. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro-Rate Reduction Plan

>>MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the Premier. Hope springs eternal. One government official said this about the Liberals' determination to make people pay an extra \$4 billion on their hydro bills. Quote -- hopefully they'll come to the conclusion that the plan can be financed by the province rather than externally, as that would be a lot simpler and cheaper. Why does the Premier ignore the advice of nonpartisan public servants and push ahead with this financial cover-up?-Withdraw.

>>Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to rise and once again talk about the importance of the policy choice that we made, Mr. Speaker. That policy choice was to ensure that we can have that clean, reliable and affordable system that we've talked about. And I know, Mr. Speaker, that we keep talking about the importance of making sure that we keep electricity costs within the electricity system, and the fair hydro plan does that, Mr. Speaker. We have always ensured that, when O.P.G. builds a new hydroelectric dam, when Bruce power, you know, refurbishes its nuclear plants, Mr. Speaker. When we see Guelph hydro for example or any utility actually invest in their system, the cost borrowing stays within the electricity system. And that's why, Mr. Speaker, we brought forward this policy choice was to keep the cost of the electricity system in that sector, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Tabuns: Thank you. Her predecessor decided he didn't have to answer to the legislature either, and that at any time end well Speaker, the A.G.'s report says that senior government officials and staff cautioned against that expensive accounting trick. She said officials noticed the design of their \$40 billion borrowing scheme, quote, will result in higher costs for Ontarians, end quote. This was cut and dry. The Liberals were told, if they proceeded with the trick, it would cost people more, and they did it anyway. Why is the Premier putting her desperate reelection hopes ahead of the needs of Ontario families?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From my understanding, the Premier's previous predecessor, when he left, we ended up winning a majority government on this side of the House because we were the party that brought forward a plan that actually benefitted all of the people of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. None of them on that side, Mr. Speaker, had a plan --Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opposition parties had no plan then. They have no plan now, Mr. Speaker. We brought forward a plan that brought immediate relief, a policy choice that we made, Mr. Speaker. A policy choice that we made. To continue to ensure we have a clean, reliable and affordable system of electricity in this province, Mr. Speaker, and something that we'll continue to do for the people of Ontario.

>>MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. And again to the Premier, the Premier's \$40 billion hydro borrowing scheme was there are going to drive up hydro bills in the long run. To hide the cost she or someone in her Cabinet authorized a \$4 billion accounting trick and added it onto people's hydro bills. The A.G. Says the Liberals were warned about this. They were given other options and they simply ignored the advice from civil servants and went ahead anyway. The Premier won't tell us who green-lit this massive betrayal of the

public trust. She refuses to release emails that show who in her party knew when and when. How many more desperate abuses of power does this Premier plan before the next election?

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>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And that's unequivocally untrue, Mr. Speaker. We have always been open and transparent as a government. We'll continue to co-operate, Mr. Speaker, with the office of the auditor general. And of course, Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate something -- Like I started off with, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about what we have done so far. 13,212 emails that have been brought in to the auditor general. 1,200 emails and records from the IESO. Hundreds from the O.P.G., Mr. Speaker. 3,242 from the Ontario financing authority. Thousands of records from the treasury board, Mr. Speaker. In this process, Mr. Speaker, we have ensured that every day and throughout our operations we're adhering to all document retention standards.

MPP Fideli to Minister Sousa Re: 2017 Budget

>>MPP Vic Fideli: Thank you and good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of finance. This morning we learned from the financial accountability office that the government's debt reduction claims are \$6.5 billion off the mark. The F.A.O. said that's equal to eliminating funding for 40% of Ontario's hospitals, to put it in perspective. They painted a bleak and stark long-term budget outlook for Ontario. Meanwhile the government continues to insist they're on track even though they use the same data the financial accountability officer used. The F.A.O. clearly stated, quote -- without an adjustment to Ontario's fiscal policy, we will see increasing budget deficits and higher levels of debt. The people of Ontario clearly cannot trust anything this government says. Speaker, will the Minister come clean about their debt claims and tell us what they plan to do to address the new concerns?

>>Minister Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. I appreciate the work done by the F.C.O. In regards to looking long term in terms of the demographic and challenges that not only Ontario -- he makes reference to the fact that all OECD countries around the world will be facing these challenges. We too came out with a long-term report last year realizing these issues. The F.A.O. rightly states we have to take measures and have to address these long-term challenges. Exactly what it is we're doing in our budget today. We are looking long term in terms of the programs we put in place to support health care, to support education. In fact universal health care that's been expanded to youth under 25 is part of that. The work that we're doing with pension reform, it's part of that, both of which that side of the House have actually declined not to do, Mr. Speaker. We need to support these very measures. We need to manage our fiscal House. That's why we're balancing the books this year, next year and the year after that.

>>MPP Fideli: Back to the Minister. The F.A.O. confirmed again this morning that their so-called balance is all with the onetime asset sales and other onetime revenues, Speaker. But here's why what the financial accountability officer's said matters -- matters to families. Means there will be quote less fiscal room for spending on government priorities such as health and education. The F.A.O. also said that Ontario is less able to respond to unforeseen events such as the next recession. Perhaps worst of all. Continuing on this course will unfairly shift the fiscal burden from baby boomers to younger Ontarians. Speaker, this week two independent officers of the legislature have disputed the Liberal -- How can families ever trust anything this government says again?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we came into office recognizing that the recession had hit us hard,

recognizing that the Conservative government federally doubled their debt, has almost the highest deficit in Canada's history under their watch and we at this side of the House also recognize those challenges, why we stimulated growth, invested heavily in infrastructure to build our economy and support the people of Ontario. Today we're outpacing Canada and the G-7 countries. Today we have the lowest unemployment in 17 years. Today 730,000 net new jobs have come to the province. And, Mr. Speaker, today we are continuing to invest long term to address the very challenges that the F.A.O. has rightly cited, one that we accept and we are taking every step to manage going forward. And we are balancing, Mr. Speaker. We're balancing the books this year. We're balancing the books next year and the year after that, and those members have voted against those measures.

MPP Tabuns to Minister Ballard Re: Chemical Valley Air Quality

>>MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, again to the Premier. Today an application was filed with the Environmental Commissioner calling for an investigation into alleged violations of the environmental protection act. The applicants allege that on February 23rd of this year, a malfunction at a petroleum refinery in chemical valley resulted in massive flaring that continued for ten days. During this incident residents in Aamjiwnaang and south Sarnia were unable to get any response from the ministry about what was going on and whether they were in any danger. Will the Premier investigate this serious incident?

>>Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite for raising what is a very troubling question. That relates to the quality of air that folks in Sarnia and first nations breathe. But more importantly what and how they're communicated with. I was down in Aamjiwnaang annual pole island just shortly not too long ago. One of the things we heard consistently was the need to improve the reporting because air sampling is done. My ministry has 11 different stations there. The first nations have 15 stations in Aamjiwnaang. Industry has a number of monitoring stations, and the town is involved with that. The city of Sarnia is also involved with that. One of the things we heard, Mr. Speaker, was the need to better coordinate that information, and I've instructed my officials to look into how we can do that.

>>MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the Premier. According to the application, quote, residents of Aamjiwnaang and south Sarnia experienced foul odour, significant vibration of houses, rattling of windows and loud noise from the flare, unquote. It must have been terrifying. The application also alleges that this incident caused a fire at the facility and another petrochemical facility next door. Despite the fire, the facility did not follow protocol and make a cdec code 9 call to notify local fire authorities. And despite receiving complaints about the incident, the ministry did not conduct air monitoring during the incident. Residents don't know what toxins were emitted. So again will the Premier order an investigation and get these families the answers they deserve?

>>Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you for the follow-up. I can assure the member opposite that there are 11 ministry monitoring stations at that are real time. They operate 24/7, and we can very quickly -- officials can very quickly -- experts can very quickly find out what's going on, Mr. Speaker. So the question is around this incident and I will make some enquiries in my ministry about this specific one so that we can follow up. But, Speaker, let me talk about what's happening in Aamjiwnaang and Sarnia in itself over the past few years. Let's talk about some of the positive things that are happening. And I'm sure the member who represents Lambton Sarnia would be happy to agree. You know, Speaker, sulphur dioxide levels -are down by 64%. Nitrogen dioxide down by 23. Particulate matter down by 43. We're taking action.

MPP Qaadri to Minister Zimmer Re: Medicine Garden

>>MPP Shafiq Qaadri: My question concerns the Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation. This is a priority for the government. Can live in peace and harmony in lands that we share across this country. Speaker, with your permission I'd just like to commend Premier Wynne parenthetically here and indeed all members of the legislature for their affirmation of social justice and equity across Canada. Given the latest example of trumpism in the province of Québec. The Minister spoke at the opening of the medicine garden on land donated by manulife, right in the heart of Toronto at 200 Bloor street east. This garden is especially significant as the first urban garden created through collaboration with the private sector rather than by indigenous organizations themselves. Speaker, my question's this. Can the Minister please tell us more about this garden and its significance for reconciliation in Canada.

>>Minister David Zimmer: Thank you, Speaker. And I thank the member for Etobicoke North for that question. Speaker, in his speech at the release of the truth and reconciliation report, Mr. Justice Murray Sinclair, now senator Sinclair said and I quote -- reconciliation is not just an Aboriginal problem. It is a Canadian problem. It involves all of us. Speaker, our government knows this to be true, and that's why we are committed to working towards reconciliation and supporting indigenous cultural revitalization, together with our indigenous partners, the private sector and indeed all Ontarians. We know we as a government cannot do it aid loan, and that's why I want to thank manulife for working with us on this project. It is an example of corporate responsibility in the best sense of the word. By ofing this garden, manulife is demonstrating that we all have --All of us, institutions and individuals, a role to play in reconciliation. The government, the public and the corporate world. Thank you

>>MPP Qaadri: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Speaker. It is of course essential that we all work together towards reconciliation. And through, Speaker, our government's landmark action plan, our government's committing more than \$250 million towards reconciliation over the next three years. But, Speaker, it's a shame that the opposition parties voted against the 2017 budget, which contains this historic commitment. Speaker, as Oscar wilde said, no man can escape his past and I would remind the leader of the opposition that while he was a federal M.P. And the Harper government voted against implementing the kelowna accord, which would have invested billions in first nations health and education, against a budget -- voted for a budget that cut \$272 million promise to indigenous language protection and he voted to impose mandatory minimums that disproportionately affect indigenous peoples. Speaker, will the Minister tell us more about our government's approach to reconciliation?

>>Minister Zimmer: Speaker, instead of voting against landmark investments in first nations health and education, we are making those investments. We are committed to closing gaps, to removing Barriers. We've committed \$150 million through the journey together alone to improve indigenous health and education. Instead of cutting funding to indigenous language projects, we are investing \$30 million over the next three years to support the revitalization of indigenous culture and languages. Instead of, Speaker, voting for mandatory minimum sentences, some of which the supreme court of Canada has ruled as cruel and unusual punishment, we have committed \$45 million to projects that will make our justice system truly culturally irrelevant and appropriate. That includes restorative justice programs and indigenous-specific victim services. Mr. Speaker --Through meaningful actions such as these, our government will continue to build trust in a respectful and mutually beneficial relationships with our indigenous partners. Thank you, Speaker

MPP Scott to Premier Re: Breast Cancer Funding

>>MPP Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Premier. While cancer research continues to develop new and innovative treatments, the cost of these treatments continues to rise. The result is that effective breast cancer treatments remain stalled in a price negotiation with pharmaceutical companies. The existing drug approval process simply lacks transparency, accountability and deadlines.

As a result it's taking too much time for metastatic breast cancer patients to access new treatments. Ontario is one of Canada's lead negotiators at the pan-canadian pharmaceutical alliance and the chair of the Canadian association of provincial cancer agencies. So my question to the Premier is -- will the Ontario government take the lead and call for transparency, accountability and deadlines in this drug negotiation process?

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. And to all the advocates who are here today, thank you so much for what you do. It's very important that we have that interaction between people who are in the community on the front line and government. Mr. Speaker, we are taking a leadership role. The Minister of health today actually is at a federal provincial table, Mr. Speaker, meeting with his counterpart Minister across the country and with the federal Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. And, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work to make sure that we make progress on this pan-canadian enterprise, because that is the leverage that we have, Mr. Speaker, to work with all of our provinces and work with the federal government to make sure that we get the best outcomes for people who are struggling with this disease, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Scott: Well, Mr. Speaker, our province does need to take the lead and address the issues with the interprovincial government body. In similar jurisdictions as the Minister of health knows, these bodies are more transparent and have timely benchmarks in the negotiation process. So if the price of a drug is too high or it doesn't meet certain conditions, the players at the table know what needs to change and they can get back to negotiating. Unfortunately Ontario cancer patients, like the ladies with us in the gallery today, are often left waiting in the dark for a year or even more. So many patients don't even live long enough to be able to get the treatment they need and deserve. That's simply not acceptable, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier, will this government take the lead quickly and help fix this process so that patients can get access to lifesaving treatments before it's too late?

>> Premier Wynne: Well Mr. Speaker -- and again I will say to the member opposite and to the advocates who have joined us today, Mr. Speaker, that the whole point of us being involved in the pan-canadian discussion, those negotiations is exactly what the member opposite is talking about, to make sure that those lifesaving drugs are available to patients in a timely way, that they have the information that they need, Mr. Speaker, and that they are affordable, Mr. Speaker, because that is -- the question of sustainability is extremely important, Mr. Speaker. And in fact the Canadian association of provincial cancer agencies represents our provincial agencies and have been asked by the Minister to tackle the tough issues of sustainability. So the whole point as I say, Mr. Speaker, of us being involved is to make sure that those medications are available, to make sure that we continue to have among the best outcomes in the world on cancer recovery, Mr. Speaker, and treatment. Premier Wynne: We will continue to play a leadership role, and again I appreciate all of the support and the work that happens here and outside of government, Mr. Speaker and treatment. We will continue to play a leadership role, and again I appreciate all of the support and the work that happens here and outside of government, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Gates to Premier (Ballard) Re: Sewage Dumping in Niagara River

>>MPP Wayne Gates: Speaker, my question's to the Premier. On July 2nd, I sent this government a letter, asked them to investigate the concerns of the dumping of raw sewage into the Niagara river. It took this government almost one full month and another letter to even reply. When the Minister of environment finally replied, he simply told me this was an American issue. Since that time, raw sewage has been dumped into the Niagara river a number of times again. Mr. Speaker, there is no stop sign or fence in the middle of the Niagara river. It connects the US To Ontario. It is a shared natural resource. Residents want

to know if damage was done to our river and how to stop these deliberate, deliberate spills from occurring. When can the residents expect the Premier to take this issue seriously and stand up for our environment and investigate these spills? Thank you.

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question I know the Minister of environment and climate change is going to want to speak to it also in the supplementary. But I want to just let the member opposite know that in fact this weekend, I will be leaving tomorrow for Windsor, Mr. Speaker. I am co-chairing with governor Rick Snyder early of Michigan, the great -- Rick Schneider, the great Lakes governors meeting, Mr. Speaker, and we will be talking about a variety of issues concerning the great Lakes, Mr. Speaker, and the great Lakes watershed. It is of primary importance to me, Mr. Speaker, that we work on things like invasive species, Mr. Speaker, on pollution issues, on the algal blooms in lake Erie much those are all issues where there has been some progress, Mr. Speaker, but there is much more that we have to do, and we at this moment, I would say more than at other points in our history. It's important that we make it clear to the United States, to our partners in the United States that we are working with them and we will continue to partner as we fight the environmental causes that are-

>>MPP Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And again to the Premier. The governor of New York acted on this issue right away. The D.E.C. Found that the sewage contaminated the water in the Niagara river. In fact, more than five of these sewage spills have occurred since I first wrote to the Liberal government. Yesterday the New York water board said they were sorry about the spills. But without necessary infrastructure improvements, after every heavy rain, this could continue for five years. We want to know what this is doing to the quality of our water in Ontario and how it will affect our environment. When can the residents expect the Premier to show the same level of concern as the people of Niagara, and when will she send someone to Niagara to test the water? Thank you.

>>Minister Chris Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. Thank you for a very interesting question, because the water is being tested. I had say that to begin with. But what I will say, since the last time I checked, you know, this Niagara -- Niagara Falls, New York is in New York, which is the United States, which is not yet anyway a part of Ontario. So what we have been doing from day one, Speaker, is working closely with our counterparts in New York state. So I will say, Speaker, that we've been in touch with our federal counterparts, environment and climate change Canada. They have assured us. They've conducted monitoring and not noted any impacts to the environment. We'll stay on top of it.

MPP Hoggarth to Minister Hunter (Mauro) Re: Municipal Government Week

>>MPP Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of education. Ontario has a rich history of strong civil representation at the local level. I know that we all appreciate the service of our locally elected representatives within the 444 municipalities across Ontario, including mayors, Mr. Speaker, Al councillors, reeves and school board trustees. As an educator I know that our curriculum is about teaching our students about local governments and the important roles that school board trustees have to play in their education. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can you please tell us what students are doing to celebrate local government week and how they are being supported at the local level.

>>Minister Mitzi Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I'm very proud to rise in this legislature. I want to thank the member from Barrie for this very timely question, because yes, this is local government week. As we speak, students in grade 5 and 10 are having a number of opportunities to learn about the importance of local governance and its role in our communities. Our students are doing great work on this area, and they're doing great things this week from touring town halls to holding mock elections at school and really

just discussing the value their local governments. I'd like to recognize the very important and critical role our locally elected school board trustees, both past and present, like our Premier in fact, have played in local democracies. It is the oldest form of elected representation in Ontario, starting since 1807. So I want to thank our local elected school boards and all the great work.

>>MPP Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. I'd also like to say it's great to see a class here learning about the legislature and local government. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of municipal affairs. It's local government week in Ontario. Young people in grades 5 to 10 are learning about how local governments support our communities. They're learning about the incredible work of our firefighters and police officers, city councillors, school board trustees and local health care workers. These are the people who work very -- every day to make our communities a better place. As an educator I can tell you that local government week is a springboard for students and can help plant the seed for future public service. These students are our future mayors, librarians, trustees, and the way we work with our municipal partners provides both an example to them and the foundation for their future success. Would the Minister please speak about the importance of our relationships with local governments here at queen's park?

>>Minister Bill Mauro: Speaker, I would like to thank the member for the question. Given that it's local government week, we'd like to recognize the efforts of thousands of people in the cities and towns we call home. Each and every day 444 municipalities across Ontario, our municipal leaders work hard to make their communities a great place to raise a family. My career in politics started at the municipal level and representing my community was a great honour. But at the time there was a clear lack of respect for municipalities by the provincial government of the day. Nothing highlighted that more than the big download and forced amalgamations. Since coming to government in 2003, we've worked hard to bring respect back to the partnership with municipalities. Our year over year for municipalities will be \$4.2 billion. In 2018 a four-fold increase from the previous government. We're making the largest infrastructure investment in Ontario's history, more than 109 billion over 13 years starting in 14/15. Through bill 149 we're proposed to overhaul the O.M.B. I encourage all of you.

MPP Pettapiece to Minister Jaczek Re: Developmental Disabilities Funding

>>MPP Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of community and social services. Oasis, the Ontario association supporting individuals with special needs, is here today. They do fantastic work supporting and advocating for people with developmental disabilities. It hasn't been easy. The development A.M. Service sector is in crisis. Oasis tells me there are more than 20,000 families stuck on waiting lists. That's outrageous. It's totally unacceptable. Community agencies want to help but this government has been nickel-and-diming them for years. To help address pay equity obligations for instance, this government keeps passing the buck. People with developmental disabilities deserve better. Why have they been so low for so long on this government's priority list?

>>Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I also would like to welcome the individuals here from oasis to the legislature this morning and I'm sure we're going to have some further dialogue. But certainly I take great issue with the premise of the member opposite's question. This government is totally dedicated to the care of those with developmental disabilities. It's now at \$2.3 billion. When I first became Minister in 2014, our government committed to \$810 million over three years. This has enhanced the services both from the day program side and on the residential side for vulnerable individuals. We recognize that there's more to do, and in fact in this year's budget, a budget -- Voted against, we committed a further \$677 million over four years. Thank you.

>>MPP Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. The oasis and the people they serve deserve better than stale talking points. They need action. Oasis tells me that in Perth- Wellington alone, there are some 710 requests for community agency services. Just this week I brought the Minister's attention to Emily and Gregory Jones. They are both autistic and nonverbal. For two years Emily has been stuck on the passport

waiting list. Greg for one year. The Fortier family has been stuck on the waiting list for two and a half years with no end in sight. And for others like Mackenzie Hunt, who do receive funding, it's not enough to meet their needs. I have met with these families. The system is badly broken and I think the Minister understands that. And so I ask, on behalf of the Jones, Fortier and Hicks families and many others, when will the government finally fix it?

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>>Minister Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First, we are certainly aware that there's always more to do. We have I believe a very rigorous system of prioritizing individuals for the funding that is available. And we understand that there can be challenging circumstances and circumstances that can change within families. We're aware of aging parents sometimes unable to care for those individuals with challenging behaviours with complex medical needs. This is why our developmental service organization prioritizes individuals, allocates funding as appropriate. We urge all families to continue that dialogue with the developmental services organization, with their case workers, should circumstances change so we can address their needs as is appropriate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker

MPP Forster to Minister Flynn Re: Workers Compensation

>>MPP Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the prrm. Earlier this year the Wynne government promised to review the unfairly rejected compensation claims of hundreds of workers who over the course of five decades worked at General Electric in Peterborough. Building everything from our household appliances to diesel engines. While they were doing so, they were exposed to over 3,000 types of toxic fumes and chemicals now known to cause cancer. The Wynne government promised these families, and I quote the Minister, a smile on their faces and a Jing in their pockets. And yet months later they're still scrambling for answers that the Minister refuses to provide. When will this government stop breaking promises, provide hundreds of grieving families of these workers, give them the support and the compensation benefits that they need?

>>Minister Kevin Flynn: Speaker, thank you for the -- thank you to the member for the question. This has been a very, very tough situation for the workers at the G.E. Plant in Peterborough, Speaker, and it's gone on for far too long. This goes back to the 50s and 60s, Speaker, when these people were exposed to today's chemical we know a lot more about today. Their employer, their health care clinics, organized labour, M.O.L., wsib, should have stepped up and helped these people. Simply put, Speaker, they did not. What we are doing in a very short period of time, Speaker, is attempting to rectify the situation. These families deserve justice, Speaker. They haven't had the justice they deserve. We are putting in place, Speaker. We've just announced from the wsib a dedicated review team that's going to do nothing but look at claims that come out of the G.E. Plant in Peterborough. I'm determined to get these people the justice they deserve, Speaker. And I promise that that will happen.

>>MPP Forster: Thank you, Speaker. While rejecting hundreds of claims of these very victims who depend on wsib the most, wsib continues to give premium cuts to businesses, almost 10% cut in premiums over the last two years. These are the widows who lost their husbands to cancer, workers who spent decades under exposed asbestos pipes and an entire community who continues to relive the horrors every single day because of broken promises. Still their claims are denied and despite the reports and the medical evidence, the burden of proof on claimants continues to rise. When will this government stop breaking its promises to the hundreds of cancer victims from G.E.? Fix our systemically flawed wsib compensation system and make sure that the families in Peterborough and the workers in Peterborough have the compensation benefits that they need?

>>Minister Flynn: Speaker, the member's right. These workers and their families deserve better, Speaker. And that is exactly what we're working to. We don't need any last-minute press releases or press conferences telling something that we already know, Speaker. We need to put a system in place. As I said we put a dedicated review team at the wsib. That's all they do. They look at claims from G.E. In an expedited manner to make sure that these folks get the justice they should have got a long time ago. The important step forward. I've met with the families on a regular basis. I understand their arguments, Speaker, and I'm trying to do something about their argument. A lot of blame to go around on this one, Speaker. My intent in the short term is to make sure that the people that deserve to get the coverage get the coverage they should be. And, Speaker, after that, we've got occupational diseases -- That we're looking at a response team for that as well, Speaker, to make sure we learn from what --

MPP Potts to Minister Brad Duguid (Matthews) Re: New Amazon Headquarters

>>MPP Arthur Potts: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of economic development and growth. Speaker, as you know Amazon recently announced that it has plans to open a second headquarters somewhere in North America and Amazon is taking bids from interested cities. There's been a lot of buzz all across North America with jurisdictions from all over saying they want Amazon to locate in their city and bring the 50,000 jobs the project will create. And today, Speaker, those bids are due and Ontario municipalities from Windsor to Sault Ste. Marie have their bids locked in. And the Ontario government, Speaker, I understand is supporting the municipalities by promoting the province's core values and our clean energy system while also building up an innovation ecosystem by strengthening the talent pipeline. So Minister, Speaker through you to the Minister, can you please tell us why Amazon should come here to Ontario?

>>Minister Brad Duguid: The member's right, Mr. Speaker. We're not offering new incentives to Amazon. Amazon will have access to the existing business supports that are available to all qualified companies whether they're from Ontario or outside. We're not going to enter the race to buy Amazon, Mr. Speaker, instead we're appealing to the number-one need of tech companies here today in Ontario and around the world, and that's the supply of world-class talent. Ontario has the most sought-after talent in North America. Our plan is to grow that important pipeline. And we will do this whether we land Amazon or not. Growing this talent pipeline will require significant effort on behalf of all stakeholders in the province of Ontario. This ambitious new initiative will not only serve potential multinational companies, Mr. Speaker. It will also help our scaling companies -- At that are working so hard to go global. We're very excited about this opportunity. We're very excited about what this will do for the future of our economy in Ontario

>>MPP Potts: Thank you, Speaker. We should all be thanking the Minister for the incredible work that he is doing building Ontario up. Quite frankly jobs and investing in Ontario. Speaker, we can all be confident that any bid for Amazon head quarter to from an Ontario city will be exceptionally difficult to meet. We know that Ontario as already a leading destination for international businesses because of its talented work force, its strong public education system and its commitment to high-quality health care and clean energy systems. Minister, we also know that we can't be content with these accomplishments. We know that we must be continuously working to expand our supply of well-trained and highly skilled Canadian workers if we are positive employer based businesses to grow into global players while also continuing to attract successful innovative businesses here. Speaker, through you to the Minister. Can you share what our government is doing to ensure that Ontario will be able to meet the demand for highly skilled workers that 21st century businesses, such as Amazon, will need to thrive?

>>Minister Deb Matthews: Well, thank you, Speaker. Our competitiveness did not develop overnight. We've been working very hard since we were elected in 2003 to nurture and develop our highly skilled work force. One of the biggest steps we've taken, Speaker, is the transformation of osap, the biggest transformation of student assistance in North America. Since 2003 the number of students attending our

Colleges and universities has increased by almost 40%, and this year, Speaker, more than one third of them will get free tuition and another third will get grants to reduce their tuition costs. We cannot rest on our success and that's why we're doing even more. We announced yesterday that whether or not we're successful with Amazon --Number of students graduating from Stanfield by 25% over the next five years. That's 10,000 more graduates.