

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Tuesday, December 12, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Tuesday, December 12, 2017

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MPP Brown to Minister Hoskins Re: Health Care Funding

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minute officer of health. And I'd asked before in this legislature about the aspects people's guarantee that I was most excited about, the \$1.9 billion investment in mental health over ten years. Now I know we've heard the government's talking points, their lines, their rhetoric that what they've done is good enough, but it isn't, and I'm going to ask again. Will they match our commitment for an additional, an additional \$1.9 billion into mental health to make sure we close this gap, this dirty little secret in our health care system?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to go through this again, because the -- in fact I will give the opportunity to the leader of the opposition to correct his record and to correct his platform as well, because when he talks about a historic, unprecedented investment in mental health, when he talks about it being the largest investment of any province in mental health in this country's history, he is absolutely and categorically wrong. And he needs to understand that his investment of \$1.9 billion being proposed would result in a dramatic reduction to the level of funding and increase that this government has actually put into place. In fact -- and I know he's laughing, Mr. Speaker, but I'm happy from now through the election to remind Ontarians that we -- Have invested over \$10 billion of new money over the last ten years. He's proposing only \$1.9 billion.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of health, and I get he's probably getting these talking points from the Premier's office, but it is incorrect. Mr. Speaker, our challenge to government is to match the commitment we're making, which is in addition, in addition, \$1.9 billion to make sure we close this gap. In 1979 we spent 11% of our health care budget on mental health. Despite all their talk, all their rhetoric, all their fake spin, today we spend 6 pors. It's not good enough, Mr. Speaker, and that's why I am challenging the government to match our commitment for an additional \$1.9 billion towards mental health. Yes or no? Of additional new funding.

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, their commitment is simply not enough. In fact I stood up in this legislature and I know the leader of the opposition is laughing now, but I'm happy to sit down with him and go through the numbers, because our increase in new funding using the precise same methodology as they do in their platform, Mr. Speaker, results in next year they're proposing to spend an additional \$151 million. In our first year of the last decade, we added \$600 million new dollars. In their second year, they're proposing an additional \$190 million. We added \$650 million. In fact if you look at their first four years of new investments in mental health, Mr. Speaker, they're proposing less than \$1 billion, considerably less than 1 billion in the first four years. We contributed new investments. Of over \$3 billion over the same period of time.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of health, and it's Liberal math at it again. They're applauding saying that everything's fine. You know yesterday we learned in the "Globe and mail" -- this is from "The globe", Mr. Speaker. The majority of people treated in Ontario emergency room after a suicide attempt are not seen by a psychiatrist within six months. Six months. I hear stories from parents and grandparents who have had a young person, a child who reached out for help, and they have to wait six months. You know there's children who are taking their lives, who had the courage to ask for help and our health care system is abandoning them and yet we've got a government saying everything is fine? It's not fine, Mr. Speaker. Will the Minister of health match our pledge to put an additional \$1.9 billion in new funding into mental health. On top of not gone through.

>>Minister Hoskins: Their bad math is not limited to mental health, because they're committed to building 15,000 new long-term care beds, but they've only budgeted \$77 million over their entire mandate to do that, Mr. Speaker. We've committed to 5,000 over the next four years. That commitment, Mr. Speaker, is going to cost the government \$380 million. They're proposing to build

three times as many beds, but they've funded, they've budgeted one-fifth what we've budgeted for just 5,000. So we're contributing \$50,000 annually for a bed. They're actually contributing only \$5,000 annually for the operation and nothing on capital. So they have to dramatically increase their commitment to make that 15,000 beds. They have to actually raise their commitment from 77 million -- almost \$1 billion, Mr. Speaker. That's another billion missing in their platform.

MPP Brown to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of finance. The government has currently been dodging questions about gas plant 2.0. There are almost \$80 million that will belong to ratepayers that are still missing. The Minister knows that electricity companies bilked ratepayers for over \$260 million of ineligible expenses and the Minister knows that there is still nearly \$80 million worth every ineligible expenses that have yet to be repaid to the ratepayers and taxpayers. So, Mr. Speaker, my question is clear and direct to the Minister of finance. Will he commit to this legislature to recoup that money on behalf of Ontario ratepayers?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Speaker, you know we take market oversight of our electricity system very seriously, and any instance of wrongdoing will be investigated and dealt with accordingly, Mr. Speaker. We are confident in the Ontario energy board and our system operator to run an efficient, reliable and fair electricity market for ratepayers across the province. There are strong measures in place under Ontario's electricity market rules that allow the system operator to identify and take action on false claims under these market programs, our system operator has the authority to conduct audits of claims made by generators and other market participants, and if needed, Mr. Speaker, our system operator can impose fines and seek the recovery of amounts that were incorrectly claimed. I know, Mr. Speaker, in the past Goreway was an example. A record cost 10 -- \$10 million fine was imposed and \$100 million in payments were recovered from the generator's total claims and 168 million. Of the \$200 million has been claimed so far.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister. We know that one of those companies gaming the system was the government-run O.P.G.. We know that they are doing this at the same time that hydro rates are skyrocketing, seniors couldn't afford their hydro bills, were being disconnected and families were afraid, petrified to open their hydro bills. How did the government respond? They ignored warning after warning after warning, and then they rewarded -- this is unbelievable Mr. Speaker -- they rewarded the former C.E.O. Of O.P.G. With a bonus of half a million dollars. A half-a-million-dollar bonus while the system was being played like a fiddle. Taxpayers, ratepayers abused. So my question, Mr. Speaker, is who signed off on this half-a-million-dollar bonus while O.P.G. Bilked the system and ratepayers had their --

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. O.P.G. Is Ontario's low-cost provider of electricity and they take the responsibility to Ontarians very seriously, Mr. Speaker. O.P.G. Works every day to ensure they act in an appropriate and fully compliant manner that respects the rules that govern Ontario's electricity system, Mr. Speaker. With regard to their participation in the real-time generator cost guarantee program, O.P.G. Believed they were acting in compliance with the program's policies as set out by the system operator. O.P.G. Has said in a statement they did not intentionally misuse the market rules and O.P.G. Was not sanctioned as a result of their participation in that program. The audit did determine that there were differences in understanding of what constituted eligible costs under the program. So in respect of some of what some of those eligible costs wrrx O.P.G. Repaid certain claimed amounts. After discussions concluded. What were eligible costs, O.P.G. Promptly repaid all of the amount to the ieso in full in 2015.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister. The response that some of the ineligible expenses have been repaid isn't good enough. The front bench of the Liberal caucus has sat idly by while this has all happened. They let these companies claim expenses that were completely ridiculous. You look at -- hear stories of expensing scuba gear in Raccoon traps. Scuba gear in Raccoon traps. I'm asking about expenses like that in the legislature, and they have the audacity to

say everything is fine. Everything is rosy. For the life of me -- and this is the reason I asked the question to the Minister of finance -- is I can't understand why four Ministers of energy and two Premiers have allowed this to happen. Mr. Speaker, four Liberals of energy, two Liberal Premiers have been asleep at the switch while this has happened. Will the Minister of finance tell us how this has been allowed?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think everyone in this House would agree that abuses within the system are completely unacceptable, Mr. Speaker, and that's why our system operator has investigated those market participants and where significant wrongdoing was present, Mr. Speaker, compensation has been recovered and returned to the rate payers. \$168 million of the \$200 million in ineligible costs have been recovered by the IESO, Mr. Speaker. The \$32 million that is remaining, those are still in discussions. An example, Mr. Speaker, is Goreway. Goreway was caught gaming the system, Mr. Speaker. They were fined a record \$10 million, Mr. Speaker, and they recovered \$100 million of those costs, Mr. Speaker, and they brought those back to the ratepayers. We all agree that the abuses of the system -- are unacceptable. That's why we continue to ensure that we've made the changes so things like this will never happen again, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Horwath to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Rate Reduction Plan

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaker, my question's to the Deputy Premier. Does the Premier of this province and the Liberal government believe that hydro bills should have partisan Liberal advertising and include partisan Liberal flyers?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is important that all ratepayers in the province know what is on their bills, Mr. Speaker. And that's why Hydro One has a pilot project under way in which they're doing a new build redesign, Mr. Speaker, helping customers right across the province that are Hydro One customers understand their bills and some of the complexity of the bills, Mr. Speaker. Knowing that they're getting a 25% reduction on their bills is important, Mr. Speaker. It's the same thing like the debt retirement charge. The debt retirement charge has been eliminated for residential customers, Mr. Speaker, but hindsight being 20-20 we thought letting people know on their bills that it was no longer a cost on there but leaving it on so people could understand that was actually the opposite, Mr. Speaker. We believe making sure that we have a clear guideline for all residential customers for all ratepayers across the province, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to work with Hydro One. continue to work with all the L.D.C.S to come up with a bill that is clear for all ratepayers right across the province.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, Ontarians deserve to know why their hydro bill now includes desperate Liberal party campaign advertising. I'm going to send an order in council across the aisle to the Deputy Premier, who's claiming this doesn't exist. If I can get a page, please. What this does is it forces hydro companies to include Liberal campaign messaging on people's hydro bills. And the order is personally signed by the Minister of energy and the Deputy Premier, who also happens to be the chair of the Ontario Liberal election campaign. Can she clarify for us, Speaker, exactly which hat she was wearing when she signed that order in council?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is this Deputy Premier, this government who wears the hat that protects ratepayers, Mr. Speaker. It's that party over there, Mr. Speaker, that voted against the 25% reduction for every single family in this province. How can they look in the mirror, Mr. Speaker, and stand up every day and say that they're defend, the ratepayers in this province when they did absolutely nothing, Mr. Speaker? Absolutely nothing. What they talk about right now is buying back Hydro One shares, Mr. Speaker. That's actually going to stop building hospitals, stop building schools, Mr. Speaker. That's what we're doing on this side of the House. When it comes to northern Ontario or rural customers or low-income individuals or first nations individuals, you know what they did, Mr. Speaker? They forgot about them. They actually didn't even put them into their plan. And they can wave their finger all they want, but the truth hurts, Mr. Speaker. It's this party that protected ratepayers.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Minister of energy and the chair of the Ontario Liberal election campaign personally signed the order for hydro utilities to include partisan messaging in Ontario's hydro bills. Who is paying for these Liberal flyers, Speaker? The people of Ontario or the Liberal party?

>> Minister Thibeault: An easy answer, Mr. Speaker. It's the people of Ontario, unlike the opposition. The people of Ontario is the one that we actually stand up for and --Again, Mr. Speaker, it's the people of Ontario, the 25% reduction that is this government that brought forward to help them with the relief, Mr. Speaker, because we invested \$70 billion in rebuilding the system, Mr. Speaker. We made sure that we have a supply that can actually be relied on, Mr. Speaker, bringing forward clean power, and that is something that we should all be proud of in this province. But when it comes to defending the interests of the people of Ontario, it is this government. We are building up our province and we're making sure that our electricity rates are as affordable as possible.

MPP Horwath to Minister Thibeault Re: Partisan Advertising in Hydro Bills

>> Andrea Horwath: My next question's also for the Deputy Premier. The Minister of energy and the Deputy Premier, chair of Ontario east Liberal election campaign, personally signed a government order forcing hydro utilities to mail out partisan flyers from July 2017 through to July 2018. That's a month after election day, Speaker. That means that partisan Liberal flyers are going to be mailed to homes across Ontario from now through to election day and beyond. So let's agree to call these flyers what they are, desperate Liberal campaign advertising. I don't think that's right, Speaker. New Democrats don't think that's right. Does the Deputy Premier think that's right?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the NDP Didn't think giving people in Ontario a 25% reduction was right. They voted against it, Mr. Speaker. I guess they didn't think giving low-income individuals a break by an enhanced Ontario electricity support program, Mr. Speaker, was right because they voted against it, Mr. Speaker. I guess they didn't think giving first nations a delivery charge credit, Mr. Speaker, was a good thing because they voted against that as well, Mr. Speaker. The list goes on and on. They vote against everything, Mr. Speaker. They vote against things that actually help people in this province. Mr. Speaker, they voted against making sure people that live in rural and northern parts of our province seen a 40 to 50% reduction. That is significant for those customers, Mr. Speaker, that are living in those parts of the province, making sure that they can actually see their bills lowered significantly, because again, Mr. Speaker, some of them don't have a choice between natural gas or electricity so they're using electricity and we're working on that as well with the Minister of infrastructure rolling out a plan to get natural gas to these communities as well, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, what isn't right is using public money for partisan purposes. That's what's not right. You know, Speaker, there isn't a single person in Ontario whose bill will be lowered because they receive Liberal campaign ads in their hydro bill. No business and no family. There is zero public good that comes from this advertising campaign. In fact local distributors are against the politicization of public bills. Jim Ryan, chair of niagara-on-the-lake hydro said this recently and I quote -- putting political messaging on the invoice is simply wrong. I agree. It is wrong. The only benefit from mailing out these partisan flyers is the Liberal party. Is the Liberal party paying for these flyers? Or is it the people and businesses of Ontario?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we have an L.D.C. Working group again, Mr. Speaker, with the electricity distributor association part of that group, which represents all local utilities across the province and they're working with us, Mr. Speaker, as part of the long-term energy plan to create a bill redesign, Mr. Speaker, so they understand what needs to be done and how we need to ensure that we make it as clear as possible for people to understand how our electricity system works and how our electricity bills work as well, Mr. Speaker. So we work with the L.D.C.S. We make sure that we work with all stakeholders in this sector, low-income individuals, first nations groups, Mr. Speaker, to bring forward a 25% reduction that they've been seeing on their

bills now for almost six months, Mr. Speaker, and that is, Mr. Speaker, thanks to us, thanks to this government, unlike the opposition who voted against it over and over again.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, he's got a working group of the L.D.C.S together so that they can figure out how they're going to put the forced partisan advertising Ontario hydro bills in Ontario. That's what's going on speaker. Ontarians should not be paying for desperate partisan Liberal flyers to be printed and then mailed to them in their hydro bills. It's bad enough that people have to open their bill and see the costs that come from decades of Conservative and Liberal privatization in our electricity system. They shouldn't have to get Liberal party campaign ads as well. Will this Liberal government do the right thing by the people of this province and stop this practice immediately?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When people open their bills in this province, what they see is a 25% reduction, thanks to this government, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When low-income individuals open their bill, they see further reduction on their bills thanks to the enhanced Ontario electricity support program. When first nations open their bill when they live on a reserve, Mr. Speaker, they will see that there's no longer a delivery charge on their bill, and that's thanks to this government working with many first nations right across the province, Mr. Speaker, and hearing and listening to their needs and acting on that, Mr. Speaker. We have made sure that Hydro One has come forward with some changes, especially with their distribution charge as well, Mr. Speaker. They're going to see the rrrp decrease their bills between 40 and 50%, Mr. Speaker. And that is something that the opposition parties voted against. That is shameful, Mr. Speaker, because we listen to the people of Ontario and acted on their request, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro Ethics

>> MPP Todd Smith: Thanks, Speaker. My question this morning is for the acting Premier. Speaker, the auditor pointed out last week that nine companies bilked electricity customers out of \$265 million on their bills. We know that three of them are Goreway, resolute forest products and Ontario power generation. We know two of the anonymous companies still sit on the panel writing the government's new electricity rules after they broke the old ones. The Premier can't have it both ways, Speaker. So why is the Premier protecting companies who cheated electricity customers, and will she stop allowing them to write the new rules for the electricity system after breaking the old ones?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again pleased to rise and talk about the market oversight that is put in place by our electricity system operator and the important role that they play, Mr. Speaker, and again I think we would all agree that any abuses of our system just cannot happen, Mr. Speaker. And so we are looking at changing the system. We've got market renewal under way and what we have there, Mr. Speaker, is rebuilding the foundation of our electricity system to allow for more flexibility, but also to ensure that the abuses of this system stop and don't continue, Mr. Speaker. So we have a working group in place right now to make sure that we can find ways to ensure that we can make this system function properly. And it is important to say, Mr. Speaker, that the two co-chairs of that working group have resigned as of December 1st and they both come from the companies that were mentioned by the member from the opposition.

>> MPP Smith: Speaker, just an absolute snow job by the government again and we need to get to the bottom of this. Even the electricity system operator, the ieso, is tired of covering for the government. The ieso told the Canadian press yesterday that the government is allowed to change the rules and disclose the names of the other six companies who cheated electricity customers on their bills. So now we're back to the greatest hits of the Liberals in question period. Who are they protecting and what are they hiding? Speaker, will the acting Premier commit to the people of Ontario that we'll have the names of those anonymous companies by the end of business today?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the ieso right now is continuing discussions with those companies, working on getting back \$32 million of costs that were ineligible, Mr. Speaker.

As O.P.G. Come out and said publicly that they were yes one of those companies, they actually resolved that quite quickly back in 2015. Through that process, Mr. Speaker, O.P.G. Thought they were applying for program costs that they were eligible for. After discussion with the system operator they recognized that they weren't eligible for these costs and so they acted quickly, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that they could repay those costs. They did that very quickly back in 2015. There was no fines levied because it was an error and they recognized that error and they fixed that mistake, Mr. Speaker. The costs were recovered and they made sure, Mr. Speaker, that it was concluded -- In a timely fashion, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Horwath to Minister Hoskins Re: Hospital Overcrowding

>> Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Deputy Premier. Week after week, we're hearing more heartbreaking stories of overcrowding inside Ontario's hospitals and the suffering that families are going through. South lake regional health centre in newmarket is operating at 125% capacity. Patients are being put in hallways, auditoriums, lounges and even gymnasiums because there aren't enough funded beds. Executives at south lake are speaking out now and calling it an overcrowding crisis. But the Premier has only given south lake four temporary beds. Why is this government doing so little to help patients who are being treated today in hallways, auditoriums and gymnasiums in hospitals across this province?

>> Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, you'll recall that a number of weeks ago, this government made the announcement that we were creating 1,200 new acute care beds across this province, and in addition to that roughly 600 for transitional care. I'm very pleased to announce and Vo proud, in fact, that we have now opened, as of Sunday, the reactivation care centre that was formerly at the finch site of humber river hospital and I want to congratulate all of the hospitals and their staff that made an absolutely perfect and seamless transition, including -- I want to acknowledge the C.E.O. Of south lake regional health centre, Mr. Speaker, because they transported 30 of their inpatients into this reactivation centre at the finch site, Mr. Speaker, and that is just one of five hospitals where they now have 125 additional beds opening. And as you can imagine reducing between 6 to 8% the complement of people and beds including at south lake. So in fact this is very important to that hospital.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, south lake has 100 more patients than they have funding to care for, but the Premier's only allocating four beds, four temporary beds. That means patients are stuck in hallways. Patients don't have bathrooms. They have to share public washrooms down the hallway from their room. People don't have privacy and the hospital isn't able to use the right kind of infection control measures. People are suffering from the crisis of hospital overcrowding in the G.T.A. And across Ontario. Why isn't this government doing more to stop the crisis that the Liberal and Conservative hospital cuts have created over these last couple of years?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we're opening and in most cases have opened the equivalent of six community hospitals across this province, and that includes so the hospitals that are involved in the humber site including Mackenzie health, south lake, north York general hospital ant humber Wilson site as well. Each of those hospitals is moving 30 of their existing inpatients into that better transitional rehabilitative and reactivation care. But in fact, Mr. Speaker, in early 2018, Markham stouffville will transfer an additional 24 and Mackenzie is going to send over another 90, Mr. Speaker. It will result in the 17% reduction in the inpatient load at Mackenzie and not to be beaten by that specific announcement, hillcrest reactivation through university health network and St. Elizabeth just opened this past weekend as well an additional 75 beds. For transitional rehabilitation care. This is a fantastic progress and I congratulate all of those involved.

MPP Dong to Minister Milczyn (Zimmer) Re: Local Poverty Reduction

>> MPP Dong: Thank you, Speaker. Good morning. My question is to the Minister of housing. Minister responsible for poverty reduction strategy. We know that even though Ontario's economy is strong, some people are still struggling to get by. Poverty is a problem that needs to be eradicated, so everyone has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential and contribute to a prosperous and healthy Ontario. One way we are working towards this goal is through the local poverty reduction fund. I know that it is a six-year \$50 million commitment by this government to help eradicate poverty in our communities and that includes my riding of Trinity- Spadina and it's working. The Minister was in Thunder Bay just yesterday to make a further announcement on local poverty reduction fund. Cot Minister tell us more about this announcement? Thank you.

>> Minister Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want to thank the member from Trinity Spadina for the question. In Ontario, we have an incredibly strong economy right now, Mr. Speaker, but unfortunately poverty remains the reality for far too many Ontarians. On this side of the House, we're committed to creating fairness and opportunity for all Ontarians. Earlier this fall announced Ontario's commitment to the poverty reduction strategy with \$16 million for 48 projects in communities right across Ontario. But yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I was in Thunder Bay to announce the indigenous stream of local poverty reduction fund initiatives created in partnership with indigenous communities and first nations. Mr. Speaker, these programs are going to assist those communities in tailoring programs that are specific to their needs that, will assist indigenous and first nations people. With food security their housing, with income supports and employment supports, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Dong: I want to thank the Minister for that answer. In fact recently I was able to announce several projects in and around my riding funded through the local poverty reduction fund. This includes funding to the access capital community fund, which will use the funding to help train newcomers, visible minorities, women, youth and other in entrepreneurship and other skills development. This funding will help so many people by giving them the opportunity to thrive in Ontario. I'm glad to hear that local poverty reduction fund is helping indigenous community in the specific. Could the Minister tell us more about our government east effort to alleviate poverty in the indigenous community and support healthy, prosperous healthy community? Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

>> Minister Zimmer: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, our government knows that poverty looks very different depending on what part of the province you're in and the needs of northern Ontario first nations can in fact be quite different than those in southern Ontario. Speaker, that's why we are investing \$5 million in 14 indigenous-led housing projects that were announced yesterday by the Minister of housing. Through innovative programs like this as well as our \$95 million in indigenous economic development fund and a further \$56 million investment in indigenous institutes, we are creating fairness and opportunity for indigenous communities. Our government knows that reconciliation requires action in addition to words and that's why we are working with indigenous communities to ensure a better future for indigenous -- Peoples in Ontario. Thank you, Speaker .

MPP Fedeli to Minister Sousa Re: AG Report

>> MPP Fedeli: Thank you and good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of finance. The financial accountability office showed us Ontario is working with three sets of books, Speaker. That is simply ridiculous. We need one set of books, one true set of numbers to guide us. There's a way to do this and that's for the government to follow the law, pass a regulation and release their pre-election finance report. The auditor general said, quote -- it's in the public interest for the government to if give us a pre-election report to examine as soon as possible, with sufficient time to do our work. This will give us one number, one set of books. Speaker, the government tell us when they will be bringing the regulation forward and when they will present the auditor with their pre-election finance reports?

>> Minister Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason there is a pre-election report is because this government mandated it, because of the -- the fact that they held and hid a deficit throughout their proposals when they were coming into a budget. We are balancing the books, Mr. Speaker. I thank the F.A.O. For the work they're doing around the city. Owe acknowledges that our economy is growing, that we have taken steps to balance the budget. In fact public accounts, which is the one that matters most what has happened to this day, illustrates we beat again our targets last year by over \$2.3 billion. Under .1 billion in terms of our actual results so I acknowledge the work being done by the F.A.O. And I recognize that the member opposite, with his whole promises are unable to keep it because his own analysis state that they are not going to be able to achieve it. I will say more in the supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Fedeli: Back to the Minister. Families need to be able to trust what the government says about our finances. They deserve a true fiscal picture. That's only fair. But the auditor general has refused to sign off on Ontario's books multiple times under this Liberal government. The auditor has one more opportunity, and that's to review a pre-election finance report. First the government must pass a regulation confirming it will release a pre-election report by a committed deadline. We want one set of books so we can truly assess the damage the Liberals have done to Ontario. Speaker, I'll ask again, will the government tell us when they will be bringing the regulation forward and when they will present. The auditor with their pre-election finance report?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we are using the accounting principles that have been provided over the last 16 years. In fact an independent review the government's pension accounting and everything else commissioned illustrated by an expert panel, concluding that the province's accounting treejts are correct. I'll leave those disputes to the accountants but I'll say this, Mr. Speaker. Kevin Paige, the individual that assessed the people's guarantee, says the following -- assessing the reasonableness of the estimates of the fiscal plan underline the 2018 election platform of the Progressive Conservative party he says this -- -- the we caution readers the reasonableness of the estimates underlined in the fiscal plan includes reliance on the third party for information. He says we do not currently or we're not currently in a position to pronounce on those expectations. We look forward to seeing more detailed plans of the future. Their numbers are based on analysis, Mr. Speaker, and they are estimating a deficit with what we're saying is --

MPP Taylor to Minister Coteau Re: Youth Mental Health Services

>> MPP Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the acting Premier. Amanda dolman and Michelle sparling are here today. They are incredibly brave advocates for children's mental health services. ZARA and Amanda needed mental health supports but, like 12,000 children in Ontario, they were told that they would have to wait for the care that they desperately needed or their parents would have to pay for it out of pocket. It's just not right that any child should have to wait months on end for mental health supports that they need. Will the acting Premier commit to eliminating the wait lists for children's mental health services so that every child gets the help they need right away?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is working to truly build a mental health system here in the province of Ontario for young people that aims to reduce wait times and offer more services to those who need it. As a government, Mr. Speaker, we've increased our mental health spending every single year since we've been in government. We've invested over \$10 billion more into the system since 2008. And, Mr. Speaker, we'll continue with that trend. Our party and the Minister of health as publicly committed, in this House on a number of occasions, that we will put forward more than \$1.9 billion over the next ten years. We're working with experts right across the system right across the province to ensure that we are putting the investments in the right place so we can reduce wait times for young people. The ministry of children -- in our ministry and within the sector. The reality is that the complexities young people are going through today, Mr. Speaker, are different from where they were ten years ago.

>> MPP Taylor: Speaker, community-based mental health centres have received only two small increases to their base funding in the past 25 years. And here's what this means for families. Moms

like Michelle have had to drive long distances to get the vital treatments their kids need. Every year 50,000 children and youth end up in crisis inside our overcrowded hospitals because they have no other place to go. As we learned just yesterday, the majority of people who are treated in an emergency room after a suicide attempt are not getting follow-up appointments with needed psychiatrists. When will this government take real action to improve mental health care and actually eliminate wait lists for children and youth across Ontario?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in 2011/2012 our government committed to a new process called moving on mental health. It was to build a new strategy here in the province of Ontario that was backed up with \$100 million investment into children's mental health in the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, that strategy commitment looks at the way we fund youth mental health here in the province of Ontario so we could actually reduce wait times. We know that this is a challenge that continues to change but, Mr. Speaker, here are some of the investments we've actually made over the last few years into youth mental health. In partnership with my ministry and ministry of health, we've built nine new youth wellness hubs for young people aged 12 to 25. We spent 3 million annually to support training professional development for indigenous mental health and addiction workers. 2.75 million for psychiatric hospitals. 16 million to create 1,000 more supportive housing spaces. Nearly 48 million for specialized mental health services in St. Joseph care group in Thunder Bay.

MPP Qaadri to Minister Hoskins (Lalonde) Re: Opioid Crisis

>> MPP Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the Honourable Eric Hoskins. Speaker, one of our mandates and indeed animating belief is our government believes everyone in the province of Ontario deserves high-quality health care that is dignified and compassionate, and that in particular, Speaker, includes those individuals fighting substance use disorders. Been clear throughout the past year we've been dealing with this as a crisis, an opioid crisis that unfortunately has taken the lives of far too many people. To address this, our government has put in place the most comprehensive opioid strategy in that country. As we were making critical investments to strengthen our strategy and supporting those saving lives on the front lines but still, Speaker, last week we received tragic news from the chief coroner of Ontario that opioid related deaths are continuing to rise in Ontario. Speaker, my question is this. I ask the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care if he would inform this House what other critical steps our government is taking to address this growing public health New Jersey?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Minister of health and as a public health physician and as a father and husband, not a day goes by that I do not reflect on the heartbreaking reality of this crisis and those numbers are unfortunately going up, Mr. Speaker. Last week in response to a recent federal policy change I wrote a letter to the federal health Minister declare this is crisis a public health emergency and formally requesting that they expand our ability to respond to the growing crisis by allowing us to approve and fund overdose prevention sites. Mr. Speaker, we were granted this exemption immediately and we can now further strengthen Ontario's current harm reduction efforts in communities and protect the courageous frontline workers at these sites from federal prosecution. Mr. Speaker, we have also ramped up access to addiction treatment across the province, including in over 30 communities. That will now be able to access effective rapid access addiction medicine clinics. Mr. Speaker, these are some of the lifesaving supports that we're providing.

>> MPP Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker. I thank of course the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care for that answer. Speaker, as a physician and parliamentarian, of course I'm pleased to be part of a government that's taken such strong action to ending the opioid crisis and all health care partners have to balance the dictate between pain control and addiction avoidance, appropriate prescribing versus street recreational use timely access to care versus harm reduction on an acute on-site basis. Our government's investments in harm reduction addiction treatment are pillars of course, Speaker, of our overall opioid strategy. We know that even more support is required for those on the front

lines. So I'd like to know what our government is doing to help our first responders in their shared fight, and I ask -- Could you develop about what the government is doing about this crisis?

>> Minister Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Etobicoke North for the question. Last week opioid overdoses numbers from the chief coroners reinforces the current need for critical action to address this crisis. People suffering from addiction are often more likely to have contact with frontline responders. It is vital that we make sure our police officers and firefighters have the tools they need to respond when they find someone in crisis. When someone is overdosing, minutes can make a difference between life and death. That's why our government is making lifesaving naloxone available for free to each and every police and fire service across the province. And, Mr. Speaker, our firefighters and our first responders. Are essential partners in fighting the opioid crisis, and we will continue working together to ensure that we continue safety in our communities. Are essential partners in fighting the opioid crisis, and we will continue working together to ensure that we continue safety in our communities.

MPP Coe to Minister Matthews Re: College Strike

>> MPP Coe: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of advanced education and skills development. Ontario's community College students lost an historic five weeks. Five weeks of class time due to the strike, which the Liberal government could have resolved earlier but chose not to. The impact has been devastating, Speaker, for Ontario students. Many students have made the very difficult decision to drop out of their community Colleges. Speaker, will the Minister of advanced education and skills development confirm today that approximately 25,000 students have dropped out due to the Liberal government's inaction to the strike?

>> Minister Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. We will be confirming numbers very shortly. We are Collecting data from Colleges to understand what that withdrawal rate was. We thought --Speaker, we thought it was important to give students the choice, given the strike that, they could either stay in and get caught up and complete their semester. I'm happy to tell you that the vast majority of students have chosen to do that. However, for those who felt --Speaker, did think it was fair to students to give them the choice to make the decision that was right for them. And if they chose to withdraw, within two weeks after the strike, Speaker. Their tuition would be fully refunded.

>> MPP Coe: Back to the Minister of advanced education. Speaker, Ontario east community Colleges have done everything they can do to encourage students to remain in school. But the Liberal government, as it did for five weeks, five weeks, Speaker, during the strike continues to sit on its hands. For five weeks, the Premier let the strike drag on and now the Liberal government is delaying the release of the number of community College students who dropped out because the information damages them politically. Ontarians have the right, Speaker, to know the consequences of the Premier's lack of leadership on the community College strike. Will the Minister stop playing politics and confirm today that approximately 25,000 dropped out from the Ontario College, community Colleges due to the Liberal government's inaction?

>> Minister Matthews: Speaker, I have committed to releasing those numbers as soon as they are available, Speaker. I reiterate that commitment today. What I can tell you is the vast majority of students have stayed. There will be a significant number of those who withdrew tuition refund and without academic penalty who will be reenrolling in January or perhaps September, depending on the program. But if the member opposite is suggesting that we throw Collective bargaining out the window, that we just legislate back, Speaker, he clearly needs to understand that, by law, we simply aren't allowed to do that, Speaker. We must let the Collective bargaining process work. We wanted to let that happen. There's no question that the people who were most impacted by the strike were the students. We've talked about that all the time, Speaker, and we've given them choices

MPP Vanthof to Minister Del Duca Re: Highway 11 Safety

>> MPP Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Last Friday morning, December 8th, there was a tragic collision on highway 11. Two transports collided on the pan lake corner and our thoughts go out to the families of the deceased. And what makes this even more tragic is, on November 24th of last year, on exactly the same corner, another person in a transport lost their life. What makes this even more tragic is on December 12th, 2012, again in the same place, another life was lost. And each time, the highway is closed. People in northern Ontario are cut off because there is no detour. People on the trans-canada. Are starting to be very afraid to drive. When will the Minister step in and insure that winter maintenance standards and highway construction is actually done correctly?

>> Minister Del Duca: Thank you very much, Speaker. I thank the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane for the question. He and I have had a chance to speak about this informally here in the chamber over the last couple of days. I have explained to him that I will ask the ministry -- in fact I have asked the ministry to go and take a look specifically at this particular section of highway 11 that as he points out in his question has had some challenges over the last couple of years so that's work we will undertake. I will be happy to inform him and/or the House once I have that update for him. I will say over the last couple of years, Speaker, as it relates specifically to the winter maintenance program that the ministry runs we have continued to invest significantly in terms of the resources that are needed both in the north for our northern highways and also in the south, Speaker. We have more pieces of equipment out on our roads and highways, including in northern Ontario than we have had certainly prior to the last three years. We are constantly working with our communities and working with our contractor partners to make sure that we have the appropriate resources deployed. I'll have more to say in the follow-up answer to this question. Thanks very much.

>> MPP Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. And since my discussion with the Minister, I've also had some time to do some research, and according to the most recent statistics provided by the government in the 2014 Ontario road safety annual report, the occupants of a vehicle registered in the district of Timiskaming are four times more likely to die in a collision than occupants of vehicles registered anywhere else in Ontario. And that's because they have to drive on that road. And that's why the government has to step in and look. The tunes, the people that road is starting to be seen as a death trap and I don't say that lightly. This is just one example. We have to step in and actually do the right thing. We don't have subways. We don't have passenger trains. We don't have L.R.T.S. We have one road, and it needs to be safe. Minister, now.

>> Minister Del Duca: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane for his follow-up question. And I certainly respect not only his advocacy but for his passion, which is obviously clear in the way that he's asked the question today. I will say as I said in my opening answer, our government continues to invest in our winter maintenance program including in northern Ontario. It seems -- so notwithstanding what the member from Kitchener just said from the NDP Caucus, in fact the auditor did recognize last year that we have made substantial improvements in the program both in Kitchener and in the north of the province, Speaker. Having said that, I understand that our work is not yet done. The member's question ties in both highway construction and investments in the infrastructure and also the winter maintenance program. I've already referenced what we're doing in winter maintenance. I will also say, Speaker, as I believe all members know over the last number of years, certainly in the last couple in particular, the amount of money that we are investing as a government -- in our northern highways program is unprecedented, Speaker. But we know that we have to continue to do more, and in subsequent years through budgets presented by the Minister of finance, I have no doubt.

MPP Martins to Minister Coteau Re: Autism Funding

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Minister of children and youth services.

Minister, last Thursday, your ministry announced the details to some very important enhancements to the Ontario autism program or O.A.P. I know our government has taken great care to consult with families in creating the O.A.P. I also know that my riding of Davenport, I have spoken with many families and passed their feedback and concerns on to the Minister. My constituents have observation pressed the need for choice and consistency in the program. Many families have also expressed the need for direct funding options. I know there has been much work to provide families with a clear choice they have been asking for, the choice between direct funding and direct service. Minister, can you please share with this House the details of the new direct funding option?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Davenport for her question. She is a strong advocate for families and for children here in the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to travel across the province and meet with families and meet with parents and talk to them about the autism program here in the province of Ontario and I just want to take a moment to thank them for their feedback. The member's right. We heard a very clear message from families when having those discussions and to respond to those families we, as a government, are introducing a direct funding options to families. So beginning January 15th of next year, so in weeks from now, we will increase the maximum hourly rate for service purchased through the O.A.P. From \$39 an hour to a maximum of up to \$55 an hour. We will communicate new qualifications for clinical supervisors that will be phased in. We'll also create an O.A.P. Provider list that will help families select a qualified O.A.P. Service provider in the spring. I will more in the supplemental, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the men Ster for listening to families. I hope all members of this House are supportive of parents' call for choice in the system, as their ask for direct funding option. There is no doubt that system transformation is a difficult undertaking and it can create a lot of confusion for families. I've also heard from parents in my riding that when it comes to accessing autism services, the system can be very difficult to navigate. In the new Ontario autism program, how is your ministry going to ensure that parents are aware of the resources available to their families and are able to easily navigate the system?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So there are a number of changes that are coming to the program. I want all families to exp Erience a smooth and seamless transition into the new Ontario autism program. The new O.A.P. Has a single point of access in each of the nine service areas. This will make it easier for families to access services. Contact numbers are available on my ministry website. I'm also hosting, Mr. Speaker, two tele-town halls, one on January 11th at 7 PM And again on January 17th at 7 PM Parents can ask questions and get direct answers from myself and ministry staff. Details of the tele-town halls and the regional provider's information are on the website Ontario.ca/autism. I hope that all members in this House are proud of this program and they share this information with their constituents. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Jones to Minister Jaczek (Flynn) Re: Bill 148 Impact on Community Living Services

>> MPP Jones: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Deputy Premier. According to community living Ontario, there will be a 25% reduction in the number of hours for supports for families with disabilities as a result of the government's changes to label laws. Community living Ontario said and I quote -- ministry representatives have told our members not to expect any base budget increases. So that means the people that stand to lose the most are people who have an intellectual or developmental disability, families, community agencies and support workers. I've spoken to many families struggling to find the services they need for their loved ones. Not one of them have said they can absorb a 25% reduction in service. With a 25% cut looming and no help offered from you, does the government expect families to fund this 25% wage gap themselves?

>> Minister Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly our ministry is committed to ensuring that frontline services are available to those with developmental disabilities, and we are aware of some of the impacts of recent changes to our legislation in terms of bill 148 that are

impacting those particular agencies. We certainly heard from them. My ministry's very aware. We are looking at the figures that they have produced for us. We're looking at them very carefully, and I would assure the member that we will not see any diminution of any services for those adults with developmental disabilities.

>> MPP Jones: I'm pleased that you're aware, but the reality is ministry representatives have told community living to, quote, not expect any base budget increases. Families who rely on special services at home and direct funding know that the government's changes will limit their ability to give their loved one the care they deserve. Brampton caledon community living president Cathy bell said, quote -- will be forced to make deep cuts to its services and labour forms. This will have a severe family living consequences for extremely vulnerable people and their family. In a letter sent to the Premier, brampton caledon community living identified the annual cost to comply with the changes at \$2.4 million. How does the government expect community living organizations and families to fund this 25% wage gap?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, thank you. Certainly I do thank the member for the question. Prior to the introduction of bill 148, Speaker --consulted broadly with the business community, with the nonprofit sector, with those people that provide services, and even after -- Speaker, after the debate -- these carry over into the arch, by the way. Speaker, what became clear was the dedicated men and women that look after the most vulnerable in our society, Speaker, sometimes needed to have their pay increased, sometimes needed better employment standards, Speaker. These are the people that look after the most vulnerable, Speaker. What we said is that we would increase the minimum wage in the province to \$14 an hour. And then to \$15 an hour. It would apply to them as well, Speaker. The opposition party voted against this, Speaker. They don't stand behind the people that look after our most vulnerable. Should be ashamed of themselves, Speaker