

***Transcript of Provincial Question Period
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Unedited Transcript

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP Brown (Clark) (Fedeli) to Premier Wynne Re: Northern/Rural School Closures

>> PC Leader Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Simcoe county and my hometown of Barrie have been hit hard by this government's attitude towards small town schools. The village of fort Mcnicoll lost their school. Wabsheen lost both their catholic and public elementary schools. Barrie central closed its doors. This Liberal government needs to reevaluate its priorities before any more communities are hurt. Mr. Speaker, will this government agree with our call for immediate moratorium on school closures?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So let me begin by saying that I understand how difficult it is to manage facilities, to manage schools in an environment where, in many parts of the province we're seeing declining enrollment. It's a fundamental challenge for school boards. Let me say secondly that I believe in school boards. I believe in school boards as important parts of the democratic system in communities. In fact school boards were elected bodies in Ontario before municipal councils. They were the first entities that communities came together to elect. So I believe the school boards are fundamental in making decisions locally. Mr. Speaker, over the years, when we came into office, we actually put a moratorium on school closures because the ravages of the previous government, Mr. Speaker, on school closures around the province, there were hundreds of schools being closed and we put a moratorium on.

>> MPP Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. Back to the Premier. Speaker, I spoke at the final del gags meeting last week before upper Canada trustees decided the fate of one in four elementary schools in my riding. I was so impressed by the alternatives put forward by school communities and the offers of support from municipalities and businesses. It shows what's possible when our rural schools are seen as a unique and valuable asset, not a liability. My communities have plans to keep their rural schools viable. It's bad enough this government is asking parents, mayors and business leaders to fix the broken education system. Speaker, will the Premier support a moratorium on school closures and give these great ideas a chance to work?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know that the member opposite is going to be very pleased at the letter that the Minister of education sent out yesterday to boards because, Mr. Speaker, there are situations around the province where a community has gone through a process and there is a plan for a consolidation or a closure of a school and a new school being built, where actually things are moving ahead very well. There are other situations, Mr. Speaker, where there hasn't been the kind of consultation between boards or with the municipality that should have happened, that the ministry has, for some time, expressed -- Mr.

Speaker ,. So what we are suggesting, Mr. Speaker, and the letter went out to directors yesterday, Mr. Speaker. What we're saying is where those conversations haven't happened, where the school boards haven't had a conversation either with each other -- As you know we have four systems in the province, Mr. Speaker. Or where the municipalities and the boards have not spoken, Mr. Speaker, we need to allow for opportunity for that to happen.

>> MPP Vic Fedeli: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. The requirements of northern and rural schools are very different than those of urban centres. These schools have small populations, and when they're put under review and compared to larger institutions, they often fail to match up. Blanket regulations created by this government put these schools at a clear disadvantage. Rural schools fall outside of the government's mould and are at high risk of closure. They're smaller, much further apart. Because of their location, these buildings don't just serve as schools. They're also our community hubs. My question to the Premier is will she give northern schools the unique attention they deserve?

>> Premier Wynne: Speaker, actually the hundreds of millions of dollars that we have had in place for a number of years to actually support northern and rural schools, Mr. Speaker, to allow them to weather the buffeting of declining enrollment was put in place exactly for that, Mr. Speaker. So what I want folks to know now is that we recognize that there are some situations where -- Boards haven't had enough of an opportunity to work together, or boards haven't had enough of an opportunity to work with municipalities to come up with some of the community solutions that we know are possible. Right now, Mr. Speaker, there are 4,900 publicly funded schools in Ontario. Only 39 of those or 37 I think -- 39. Only 39 of those, Mr. Speaker, are collaborations between boards. We think there can be more of those and we want to give boards sometime to develop those collaborations, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Martow (Coe) (Cho) to Premier Wynne (Hunter) Re: Rural School Closures

>> MPP Gila Martow: Thank you again to the Premier. When I took office three years ago, this government offered to find creative ways to keep our schools open. One of their repeated suggestions was to turn our schools into community hubs, make them the heart of their communities. Unfortunately they never followed through, and as a result entire communities are being decimated. In my riding of Thornhill, stornoway crescent school has been slated to close. Even though young families are moving into the area. The Premier needs to admit that these constant announcements of school closures forces panicked communities to huddle together in protest. Our protest rallies outside our schools really what this Premier had in mind as community hubs?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, you know, as I said, for a number of years, we have had in place, through the ministry of education, an encouragement and policy guidelines to actually encourage the conversation between school boards, between school boards and municipalities, and in some situations that has happened. And I will just say, Mr. Speaker, oftentimes an MPP Can play a very constructive role in bringing people to the table and establishing those conversations, Mr. Speaker. That can be a very, very important role for school trustees and MPP S. Collaborations have happened, Mr. Speaker, but there are some situations where there's been a reluctance, either on the part of a particular school board or a municipality. That needs to happen going forward, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Many constituents in my riding are concerned as schools in their local communities are being considered for closure by this Liberal government. In Durham region in particular, epsom public school in scugog, Dora central public school in Brock. I'm hearing from parents that this government's school closure review process is a sham. The Ontario alliance against school closures has said that this review process is just a democratic facade, Speaker, and that parents are being heard but not listened to. Moratorium on rural school closures and stop ignoring the parents' concerns?

>> Premier Wynne: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I put a challenge out to every MPP In this legislature, Mr. Speaker. There has been a letter gone out from the Minister of education to -- and from the Minister of rural affairs, to say to school boards, you have an opportunity now. We have a community hubs advisor. There are conversations that can happen in communities, and I say to all MPP S, where those conversations are not happening, they should be happening. If there's an opportunity for a creative collaboration, municipalities to school boards, we will be looking at those, Mr. Speaker, and, as a ministry, the Minister of education will

facilitate those conversations, Mr. Speaker, but it behooves school trustees, school boards and municipalities and community groups to work together for the better of the best of the community, Mr. Speaker. That's a much more productive process than a blunt instrument of a moratorium that does not recognize the individual opportunities in every community, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Raymond Cho: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. I attended three community meetings at three different catholic schools in my riding. Parents are deeply concerned that their children -- No consideration is given to the distance kids have to travel to their new school. No consideration is given -- Large number of students miss potential for kids to participate in school sports. No consideration is given to the students with special needs. Why would you put students and their families through all this, Premier? Why would you introduce a moratorium on school closures?

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I want to say thank you to the member opposite for that question. Attending those discussions amongst schools is exactly what you should be doing in terms of hearing from the school board and the school board hearing from the local community in terms of what is the best plan for this community? And as the Premier has said, the role of locally elected school boards is vital to local communities, that we want to ensure the reason we have a pupil accommodation review guideline is to ensure those meaningful conversations take place. Because these decisions are very difficult decisions. Whether they're occurring anywhere in the province, they're very difficult decisions. And it's important that that input is had from all parts of the community. And that is exactly what is happening, Speaker. With these conversations that are occurring is ensuring that, as school boards are required to make the decisions, that they get that input from all parts of the community.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question's for the Premier. The Premier has dubbed her band-aid solution to the hydro crisis in Ontario the fair hydro plan. Odd because she didn't even mention the completely unfair mandatory time of use pricing that Ontario families and businesses have been suffering under. How can the Premier claim her plan is fair when it leaves seniors and young parents at home with their kids to pay more, while lining the pocket of her friends on bay street?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I not men sterl of energy's going to want to speak to the work that he's doing to look at the market pricing and to look at there are ways of providing options to people. But, Mr. Speaker, the fair hydro plan in Ontario is about taking an average of 25%, Mr. Speaker, off the bill of every one of those people that the leader of the third party identified, Mr. Speaker. That is fair. It's also fair, Mr. Speaker, that people who are living in rural and more remote areas and are paying disproportionately high distribution charges, Mr. Speaker, that they would have relief as well. It's also fair, Mr. Speaker, that people who are living on low income would have extra supports. That's what makes the fair hydro plan fair, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, last week I visited versatile inn in Sarnia and spoke with the owner a woman marlu Malik. She told me about her nearly \$8,000 hydro bill. She wants relief but the Liberal government doesn't fix problems like mandatory time of use pricing. When will this Premier deal with the important issues in our electricity system, like ending mandatory use pricing instead of focusing on her political well-being?

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to rise again to talk about the fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, that's going to be helping every ratepayer across the province with a 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker, as soon as we can get this legislation passed through the House, Mr. Speaker. It is important to know, Mr. Speaker, that time of use is something that we've been working on for months, Mr. Speaker. We've recognized that, you know what? A senior couple living on a fixed income in northern Ontario shouldn't be on the same retail price plan, Mr. Speaker, as a single condo dweller living here in downtown Toronto. So that's why, Mr. Speaker, we asked months and months ago the ieso to start work on this, Mr. Speaker. To start looking at bringing forward some other options besides time of use, Mr. Speaker. But while they're doing that, Mr. Speaker, we continue to act. We've brought forward other reductions. Last week, Mr. Speaker, a 25% reduction for every family across this province.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker senior sitting at home in Sudbury shouldn't have to wring their hands worrying about turning the lights on and turning the stove on during the day. That's not fair, Speaker. That's not fair. The woman in Sarnia that runs this motel told me that she washes her own towels and pillowcases for the hotel -- washes, to save a bit money but even that isn't very helpful because her staff have to do the laundry during the day so that they won't wake up the guests and that forces her to pay peak electricity prices, Speaker. Why didn't this Premier address the unfair time of use pricing in her desperate attempt to save her own political skin?

>> Minister Thibeault: Speaker, the one thing that's very important to also highlight, Mr. Speaker, about our government's fair hydro plan is it delivers a 25% reduction for not only every House hold in the province, Mr. Speaker, but to a half a million small businesses and farms, Mr. Speaker. That is something we should all be proud of. Not only, Mr. Speaker, the Ontario chamber of commerce has highlighted the importance of the small business and the challenges they face and, you know, many regional Chambers have spoke to us about that so we listened, Mr. Speaker, and we took action. Every ratepayer who pays time of use prices in Ontario. Will receive the 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker. This includes House holds. Farms, businesses and more, Mr. Speaker. We're very proud of the fair hydro plan.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne (Thibeault) Re: Hydro 25% Reduction Plan

>> NDP Leader Andrea Horwath: Thank you very much, Speaker. My next question's also for the Premier. Last week, I also visited with Cheryl and Scott Rickman at their farm in Chatham. They told me that they pay \$75,000 in hydro bills last year alone. For a small business that's a lot to take, Speaker. The Premier says she's concerned about hydro bills like Scott and Cheryl's, but her plan doesn't give them any long-term protection. Why is the Premier bringing in a short-term band-aid when what she needs is a long-term fix. What they need, what Ontario needs is a long-term fix to the energy system that this Liberal government messed up in the first place.

>> Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're very pleased to be able to stand and talk about the fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, and how this is going to benefit farms right across the province, Mr. Speaker, farms that will see a 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker, in their electricity bills, Mr. Speaker. This does much, much more for small businesses right across this province, Mr. Speaker. And at the same time those businesses that are larger, Mr. Speaker, those businesses like our small manufacturing sector, they can now qualify for, Mr. Speaker, the enhanced I.C.I. Program. That's, Mr. Speaker, helping them save up to a third, a third of their energy bill, Mr. Speaker. That's, Mr. Speaker, because we've taken action to ensure that we're helping not only residences, not only small businesses, not only farms but our manufacturing sector, Mr. Speaker, and our large businesses as well.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, Scott and Cheryl have reduced their hydro consumption by 40% over the past year, but none of that, none of that translated into lower electricity bills. The Premier's plan doesn't address time-of-use pricing. It doesn't address bad contracts that she signed. It doesn't address the oversupply of energy that we are paying private and foreign companies to generate that we don't even use, Speaker. It doesn't stop the wrong-headed sell-off of Hydro One. Can the Premier explain to small business owners, like the richmans, why her plan doesn't address any of the underlying problems in our hydro system and why any relief that comes under her plan will only be temporary?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I think the leader of the third party needs to do is put down her plan that doesn't address anything, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't save one cent for families or businesses in this province, Mr. Speaker. And actually look at ours, Mr. Speaker, and see what the fair hydro plan does. 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker, for small businesses, farms and residences right across the province, Mr. Speaker. I.C.I. Programs enhanced, Mr. Speaker. Helping our manufacturing sector and all our businesses, Mr. Speaker. We're

actually helping low-income individuals, Mr. Speaker, which their plan didn't even address, Mr. Speaker, until the last page. We're making sure those who are most vulnerable, Mr. Speaker, actually get the help that they need. When it comes to our first nations, Mr. Speaker, those living on reserve, we are also making sure, Mr. Speaker, that there is a new rate for them. They're actually getting actually help, Mr. Speaker. We're actually helping in the province, unlike the opposition over on that side, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, nobody believes for a minute anything that came out of the mouth of that Minister a moment ago. Certainly nowhere near the reality of -- look. Here is the reality though, Speaker. The Liberal plan does nothing more than make a last-ditch effort on behalf of this government and this Premier and her political party that's trying to hold on to power here in this province for just a little bit later. Maru Malik knows it, Speaker. The rickmans know it, and in fact everybody in Ontario saw it for exactly what it was last week. When will this Premier stop putting the interests of her banker friends and her political party ahead of the interests of small businesses, families, industries and mining in the province of Ontario?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So let's talk about who else is talking about the fair hydro plan and all of its benefits, Mr. Speaker. Francesca Dobin executive director of the United Way Bruce- Grey, Kathleen Wynne's government is listening to people. With these positively changes our rural community will now truly benefit from the low cost power it produces. Isidor day the Ontario regional chief. The elimination of the delivery charge will assist our citizens by reducing energy poverty in our communities and also represents recognition for the use of the land and the development and expansion of provincial energy grids. Today's commitment by the Ontario government is commendable and allows a path forward for greater quality of life for our first nations in Ontario. Mr. Speaker, I can keep going on the number of quotes that we have here. I'll do so, Mr. Speaker. I know I won't have time but I look forward to talking about more, Mr. Speaker, in some of my supplementaries.

MPP Harris (McNaughton) to Minister Hunter Re: Rural/Northern School Closures

>> MPP Michael Harris: My question's to the Premier. Last night I attended the final meeting where delegates' desperate plea to save St. Ath THA school could be heard again from the Waterloo catholic board. The third time in nine years parents have had to fight to save their beloved school. It was just over two years ago parents thought they could breathe easier after their -- To an end. And yet there they were again last night making the same arguments to save the same rural school this government's new review rules allowed to be placed right back on the chopping block. Speaker, it's cruel and unfair to expect parents and communities to fight on an almost annual basis to keep their school doors open. Will the Premier end the constant battle faced by rural students, parents and communities like mine in Wilmot and St. Ath THA? Will she call for an immediate moratorium on rural schools –

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to rise and to talk about the fact that we are investing in schools across this province because we know that every student in Ontario deserves the best education possible, Mr. Speaker. And when a decision has to be made and a board and a community come together to make a very tough decision about the change of a school, whether it's the closure of a school, the consolidation or in the instance I know that with the member from Peterborough, we announced two schools coming together to form one new school, Mr. Speaker, because that is in the best interests of the students and the local community. Mr. Speaker, an arbitrary moratorium is not the answer. We want to ensure that our elected -- or elected trustees can make decisions locally that are in the best interests of their communities, Mr. Speaker. Which of course meaningful input provided by all sides of the community to make that tough decision.

>> MPP Monte McNaughton: My question is to the Premier. This government is now planning to close up to four forest area schools, pulling students out of their communities to take long bus rides to attend a superschool, the first in Lambton county to have students from kindergarten through grade 12 in the same building. At the direction of the provincial government, the Lambton- Kent District School Board has closed 14 elementary schools, three high schools and one adult learning centre. These buildings are important to the health and future prosperity of these communities. Speaker, will the Premier finally recognize the vital importance of rural and small-town schools to the social and economic life of their communities and place a moratorium on school closures until the funding formula can be fixed?

>> Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, we know that schools are vital to the social fabric of our communities, Mr. Speaker. And that is why we are asking boards

and municipalities to work together, Mr. Speaker. We're also asking boards to work with each other. The coterminous boards and communities to come together to talk about the joint use of school spaces, to talk about how do we serve the needs of this local community in the best way possible on behalf of the students in our community, Mr. Speaker, as well as on behalf of the community as a whole. And, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that in rural communities there needs to be greater and more investment, and that is exactly what we have done, Mr. Speaker, through the grants for student needs. We have funded our rural and our northern schools to a greater degree. We put standards in place, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that every student in Ontario gets the best education possible and we're going to continue to make those investments.

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins Re: Drug Shortage

>> MPP France Gelinas: Voice of Translator: Thank you for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. [End of Translation] Speaker, the last thing that a cancer patient and their family want to hear is that their treatments will be delayed. Just think about it. You have cancer. Your life depends on prompt treatment, and you're told that you will have to wait, that there's a chemotherapy drug shortage. That's exactly what's happening right here in Ontario, Speaker. And now we know that at least 35 people in Richmond hill have had their cancer treatments delayed. Yesterday the Minister said that he knew nothing about the chemo drug shortage. Will the Minister tell us how many cancer patients across Ontario have suffered delays in their cancer treatments and how many hospitals have been impacted by this drug shortage?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to address this extremely important issue. A member opposite is correct that we did see for a brief period of time here in Ontario, a shortage of a particular drug called 5 Fu, which is used for treating cancer, particularly gastrointestinal, breast and other related cancers. The result -- this is the result of a shipment that was provided through health Canada, Mr. Speaker, and was put in quarantine because of some concern about the integrity of the vials that contained the cancer drug itself. The federal government and I think the member opposite probably saw their press release yesterday where as a result of this shortage, which was a federal issue, as a result of the quarantine of the supply, that they released 3,000 vials that they had deemed to have sufficient integrity, which they're confident will result in no further shortage until the manufacturer's able to provide additional vials in the future.

>> MPP Gelinas: Thank you, Speaker. I understand that health Canada has taken steps to try to fix the shortage at least in the short term, but it doesn't explain how the Minister of health wasn't even aware that it was going on. When cancer patients are forced to delay their treatments because of shortage of chemo drugs, this is as close to life and death as you can get. I would think that the ministry of health -- Would want to know about such a failure of our health care system so that he can take steps to correct it. My question is simple, Speaker. When was the ministry of health informed of this drug shortage and why did it take so long for the Minister to find out about it?

>> Mr. Speaker, you know it is important that Ontarians have the facts so the ministry of health was informed by cancer care Ontario was informed by the hospital in question on Friday. I was asked about the question Monday morning just after question period, Mr. Speaker. Cancer care Ontario then, when they were notified, notified the ministry of health of this federal issue, Mr. Speaker, that has been addressed within really over the course of a weekend to the point

where 5:00 yesterday afternoon, the vials had been released. But it does point to an important issue and that is the coordination of all parties. We certainly if a hospital is anticipating a shortage of medicines, they need to get in touch with the ministry of health, cancer care Ontario, with the federal government as in this case so we can address that promptly prior to it becoming an issue. We also have a system through cco where once they're informed. They look at the entire provincewide inventory, and in this case they would have been able to reallocate vials that are available through other hospitals to the D.D.R., Mr. Speaker.

MPP Martins to Minister Sousa (Leal) Re: Craft Distilleries

>> MPP Cristina Martins: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of finance. Minister, I know that over the course of this the last session we have heard false statements from the opposition claiming we have -- Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we know that this cannot be further from the truth. We know that the recent changes introduced in bill 70 will actually make craft distillers better off, increasing the revenue margins from sales at on-site stores from 39% to 45%. Cot Minister please explain what other supports we are offering to this growing industry and how they will help small distill Eries?

>> Minister Charles Sousa: I would like to thank the member from Davenport for the question. I'd also like to thank her for clarifying a very important point. As we've stated time and time again, we are committed to helping Ontario's small businesses scale up and we're committed to investing in our rapidly growing community as well as spirit producers. In fact just this morning I was at the Icbo alongside Minister legal, Martin to& announce our government's new support program for small cider producers and small distill Eries. Mr. Speaker, this new program will invest \$4.9 million over three years between the craft cider and spirit sectors. That means that a producer can receive as much as \$220,000 in funding per year. It's a program that will help support growing cid Eries and distill Eries, hire more staff, buy more equipment, secure more funding for on-site stores. Mr. Speaker, these changes are good for business, good for consumers and good for Ontario.

>> MPP Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm thrilled to hear that the government's taking steps to support these growing industries, and I was pleased to join Minister sues av, Minister legal and my Colleague the MPP For Beaches- East York at the announcement this morning. And I know that young distillery from my riding of Davenport have already expressed their contentment with the exciting changes that we are making to this industry. I know that beyond my riding of Davenport there are cider producers and distillers that play a critical role in local economies across the province. It's clear that this support will help increase the availability of locally produced spirits and ciders for Ontario consumers. Could the Minister please share with the House why this government is launching this new program and how these businesses are using other Ontario products?

>> Minister Jeff Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The good folks in Peterborough riding that I wasn't imbibing at the Icbo this morning at 9 A.M. Just there for announcement. I want to thank the member for her advocacy work on this particular file but I also want to acknowledge the good work that was done by the member from Beaches- East York, Mr. Quan. The member from Dufferin-

caledon miss Jones and the member from Niagara Falls Mr. Gates that Collectively we've all been working together to make this industry grow in the province of Ontario. And that's why we need to work together to help our small cid Eries and distill Eries. Create jobs in their communities and provide customers with locally made choices. Mr. Speaker, -- yesterday to be with Charlie Stevens

MPP McDonnell (Walker) to Minister Hunter Re: Rural/Northern School Closures

>> MPP Jim McDonnell: Thank you, Speaker. To the Premier. The ministry of education -- the ministry of education has declined needs of rural schools for years. Public boards have a mandate to provide education to all students in an area. If the government makes it impossible to maintain infrastructure, address rising costs or adopt new technologies. Now when push has come to shove the Premier points her finger at the boards and blames them for the problem. In my riding of Stormont- Dundas and Glengarry still stands to lose a number of excellent public schools, including Roswell osdenbrook and north Stormont public. Despite public meetings of up to 1,000 people. Providing meeting and Leth -- athletic facilities. When will the Premier show some commitment to giving our students a good public education close to home and place a moratorium on the 600 schools. Until a thorough review of educational funding for rural schools is complete?

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Premier. Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for this question, Mr. Speaker, because the member opposite and I have actually visited schools in his area and beyond. You know, we've been up and down the concession roads. He knows that I know and the community knows that schools are a vital part of the community, and that's why these conversations are difficult conversations for local boards, Mr. Speaker. One of the aspects in the letter that I September to the chairs of school boards and to all municipalities, along with Minister Chiarelli, is that boards work together with their local communities, with their municipalities as well as with the coterminous boards and communities because we want to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that we are making the best possible decision on behalf of the students in that area. And if that means a board can come together with another board. For joint use of space, then we will support that, Mr. Speaker. We have funding in place to support those types of initiatives. And they will be given priority.

>> MPP Bill Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the Premier. Premier, you say you got into politics because of education. The people of paisley feel you have lost your way and you're now only concerned about power and serving yourself. They have lost confidence and trust in you. Last night I got a text from Dale who asked me on behalf of his community to stress the devastation you will cause if you close the only school in town. In markdale Chapman's ice cream has stepped up to buy the school. The municipality have invited you and the Minister to come and visit, to get out and learn what's happening. The people of markdale stepped up. Premier, you have found billions to try to save your political career and take care of your cronies and fix mistakes you have made. It's never too late to do the right thing. Will you step up? Will you

put a moratorium on any more school closures today? And avoid another fatal mistake that will devastate communities across our province?

>> Minister Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, as municipalities, communities, organizations come together with their local school boards to find the best possible solution for their local community, Mr. Speaker, I am confident that they will be -- they will continue to make good decisions on behalf of their communities, putting the needs of students first, Mr. Speaker. And whether that's the great programming that students receive, when they have the necessary investments in their schools, Mr. Speaker. The student experience and the outcomes for students is extremely important, Mr. Speaker. And it's one of the reasons why we sent this letter is to remind school boards of their obligations to meet with local communities so that these great examples can be brought forward and can be supported, Mr. Speaker. That is exactly the intent and that is why an arbitrary moratorium is not ill advised. We want to ensure --

MPP Taylor to Minister Coteau Re: Social Services Agencies

>> MPP Monique Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. We know that good health outcomes and success in education are determined in large measure by social conditions. Today we are joined by workers who are here for opseu social services day. Among other roles, they work with children with mental health issues. They protect children from neglect and abuse. This is adults and children with disabilities, and they support women fleeing violence. They're asking for a bolder vision on social services that recognizes that children and families have better health and education outcomes when we invest in a strong social safety net. Will the government commit to funding based on that vision and stop cuts to services?

>> Minister Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to first start by thanking all of the -- all of the child protection workers, anyone who works in public education, anyone in this province that works to help our children. I want to thank them for doing what they do because they're without a question one of the most valuable people in our community. Plau, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, our government has been working to strengthen, to modernize, to transform our child protection service agencies here in the province of Ontario. The real purpose at the end of the day is to make sure young people have what they need to be successful. And we know that our children's aid societies, there's high expectations for them to deliver the best possible services possible. And that's why we keep investing. We made sure we changed the model five years ago to look at meeting the needs of a particular community rather than just giving money based on historical numbers. And the member opposite knows that most of those staffing decisions in our child protection agencies. Are done locally by the child protection agency.

>> MPP Taylor: Back to the Premier, Speaker. Budgets in child welfare and children's mental health have been flat lined for years. It's the same story right across our social services. Agencies and workers are having to do more with less. There are 12,000 children and youth waiting for mental health services. Children are moved far from their communities to access residential beds. Women are being turned away at shelters. I ask again, will the Premier stop cuts and commit to funding services to ensure that every person in this province gets the services that they need?

>> Minister Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been looking for ways to transform the services that are out there for young people. The member knows that we have now bill 89 that is going to change the way child protection agencies work here in the province of Ontario. We're looking for ways to ensure that there are less children that go through care. Mr. Speaker, over the last several years we've had a 19% reduction in children using the services through

child protection. We have more young people who are being adopted here in the province of Ontario and finding permanent homes. Mr. Speaker, when it comes to mental health, we do have a strategy in place. We've made a commitment that we'll be looking at the funding formula but we've just transformed our system to put lead agencies throughout the province to ensure that they have the tools necessary. There's a commitment by this government to continue to invest in children, which we have been doing in public education. In child mental health and in child protection services. Thank you.

MPP Baker to Minister Sandals Re: Open Government

>> MPP Yvan Baker: Thanks very much, Speaker. My question is to the president of the treasury board. As you know, Minister, I am passionate about addressing youth unemployment and underemployment and that is why I introduced a private member's bill on pathways to postsecondary education which will do just that, create a website, give students the information they need so they can make an informed decision about their future career and postsecondary choices. Minister, you are responsible for strengthening Ontario's efforts to become the most open and transparent government in Canada. I know this aligns well with the work being done in- digital government by Minister Matthews. I represented this weekend our government, Minister, at civic tech Toronto code across hackathon. I invited participants to help solve some of the challenges facing our province. I also invited them to design a tool similar to that in my private member's bill to help understand labour market demands, the skills they need it achieve those jobs and the postsecondary programs that would allow them to achieve, acquire those skills. And ultimately pursue their career goals. Could you tell us how we are using hackathons like code across to create value from Ontario's open data to benefit all Ontarians?

>> Minister Liz Sandals: Yes, thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member from Etobicoke Centre for his enthusiastic support of our open data mandate. And for representing our government at code across. Ontario was a proud responsible sore of code across, a hackathon where citizens come together to collaborate on technology and design solutions based on some of the data sets publicly posted by the Ontario government. This year Ontario provided seven challenges to civil society, ranging from the member's challenge to map career pathways to creating an act that assists landlords and tenants in resolving their disputes without having to go through the landlord tenant board. By the end of the day wire frames had been -- for a new health care act to provide users with digital access to their immunization records. Dashboard which would allow users to view employment stat statistics.

>> MPP Baker: I know in Ontario we are already doing tremendous work when it comes to openness and transparency. I actually heard we were one of 15 sub nationals worldwide invited to join the open government partnership Abt only province invited in Canada. The philosophy Ontarians can work alongside governments to Jen rate ideas is alive and well and alive and well on Saturday. I had the opportunity to meet with Gabe sa hi. Budgetpaedia, actually a tool that allows people to visualize Toronto's budget and democracy kit aproject at that that seeks to support councillors and school board trustees with resources. I was impressed with the hackathon because some of Toronto's brightest young people, Minister, came together to find ways of using data made available by our

government and innovative technology. To solve some of the most important challenges facing our province and every ride AIG cross Ontario. Minister, could you tell us how our government is continuing to work with active and engaged citizens like those represented at code across on Saturday?

>> Minister Sandals: Thank you, Speaker. In December I actually had the opportunities to attend the open partnerships global summit. The summit involved over 3,000 representatives from 70 countries who gathered to push forward the open government agenda. At this event, I was proud to announce that Ontario would be strengthening our commitment to openness by adopting the international open data charter. Speaker, open data commitment to increasing access to data has already LED to the production of a data catalogue of over 2,000 government data sets of which we have already published 560 online. Data sets are filling a real need in our set. Our top ten most frequently downloaded data sets are quite diverse. And include thin -- things like monitoring greenhouse gases emitted from manufacturing facilities, stats on public libraries. And marriage reg --

**MPP N. Miller (Nicholls) to Premier Wynne (Hunter) Re:
Rural/Northern School Closures**

>> MPP Norm Miller: This is for the Premier. Last week the Simcoe- Muskoka catholic District School Board under the Premier's pupil accommodation policies decide today close our lady of mercy elementary school in honey harbour this June. These students will either be bubbled to St. Antoine Daniel catholic school in Victoria harbour or attend honey harbour public school. Unfortunately, because of this government's flawed accommodation review policy, honey harbour public school is at risk of being closed as well. A final decision is expected next month. Honey harbour is in danger of losing both its elementary schools in one year. The Premier must understand just how critical local school is to a small community. Without a school, they cannot attract families and businesses to locate there. Speaker, will the Premier agree to a moratorium on rural school closures until she can find a way to help communities like honey harbour keep at least one school open?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Mr. Speaker, you know, again another great example. The last question from the opposition was also an example, an example where the collaboration between school boards and with municipalities could make a huge difference. And, Mr. Speaker, when I was at the ogra, rather at the Roma conference, Mr. Speaker, and I was talking to municipalities, the municipal leaders were thrilled to here that we were -- to hear we were working with school boards and that we were going to be requiring -- We were going to be requiring the school boards work with each other, the coterminous boards work together. Again this is a perfect example of where that could happen, and with municipalities, Mr. Speaker, because there are opportunities. That's why I hope the member is pleased with the letter that's gone out, because we are saying clearly, if you can find alternate solutions, if you can work together, we're going to work with you. We're going to facilitate that, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Rick Nicholls: I'm sorry. I didn't hear. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Back in 2014, you were on record by saying that there would be no cuts to schools. Jim Costello, director of the education for the Lambton- Kent District School Board, is quoted as saying -- until the ministry changed the funding formula in April of 2015, we were able to survive. A lot of that funding has been drastically reduced, unquote. Premier, schools are struggling to keep up with skyrocketing hydro fees, cap and trade costs, natural gas. Premier, look, I just don't have time to list all the schools in my riding of Chatham-kent- Essex that are currently on the chopping block. However, richtown, for example, is very nervous about losing its high school and I should also add. Will also be a huge issue if it closes. So, Premier, will you support a moratorium on rural schools closing?

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. And, Speaker, you know I want to say that our commitment to rural schools is firm. Mr. Speaker, since 2003, we've increased the per pupil funding for rural schools by \$5,007. That's a 67% increase, Mr. Speaker. And since -- in fact, we've increased the annual funding to rural boards by \$200 million. Mr. Speaker, that is regardless of the enrollment levels that we have been continuously investing in and supporting our rural schools. That being said, Mr. Speaker, there are discussions that boards need to have regarding their use of schools. Those conversations are happening. We've put in place a pupil accommodation guideline that requires boards to work with their local communities, with their coterminous boards to make the best decisions possible.

MPP Vanthof to Minister Leal Re: Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers Board

>> MPP John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. The processing vegetable sector is extremely important to the economy of southwestern Ontario and to the province. And each year at this time there's a negotiation that goes on between the processors and the farmers who are represented -- the farmers are represented by the Ontario processing vegetable growers, and they are duly elected boards. They represent their members. They hold annual meetings. I checked their auditor report and it was clean. And these negotiations sometimes can be tough as all negotiations are, and sometimes they end up in arbitration, as often negotiations do. But that's the spirit of negotiations. But what happened on Friday is the powers of the board were stripped. The Minister removed the board. My question, our question is is that in the best long-term interests -- Of a sector that's vital to the Ontario agricultural --

>> Minister Jeff Leal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Timiskaming- Cochrane for his question this morning. Mr. Speaker, as Minister of agriculture, food and rural affairs, one of the most difficult questions I've had to deal with and make a decision on was last Friday. We made a decision to appoint a very distinguished public servant in the province of Ontario, the Honourable Albert Buchanan, to be a trustee. Mr. Speaker -- Mr. Speaker -- Mr. Speaker, it was clear to me that an impasse had been reached by the process vegetable growers of the province of Ontario. The -- the processors that we had to make a decision so that we would not lose the 2017 crop. This would impact farmers, impact jobs and we want to sustain regulatory marketing in the province of Ontario. That's the decision we made for farmers in Ontario.

>> MPP Vanthof: Mr. Speaker, the important part of that response is the Minister made the decision. The Minister made the decision to strip the powers of the representatives of the opvg, Ontario processing vegetable growers, actually elected by their members to do those negotiations. I'm getting e-mails from vegetable growers wondering where they fit in this because a public meeting was held where questions from the floor weren't allowed only to be read. So they're wondering they have millions of dollars also invested and where do the farmers fit in this equation? Because they certainly weren't part of the decision to strip the powers of their board.

>> Minister Leal: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for supplementary question. I provided him and the critic for the opposition the courtesy to call them personally to give them the opportunity to have detailed briefings on this matter. I want to reference the Honourable member a letter that that was sent to me by the Ontario process vegetable growers on February 22, 2017, when they told me that

both sides had reached an impasse. They were asking me to take absent and we took the right action last Friday -- took the right action last Friday, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Colle to Minister Hoskins Re: Mental Health Support Services

>> MPP Mike Colle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the Minister of health. As you know, Minister, I've expressed my deep concern about the fact despite the fact we spent \$3.7 billion every year in mental health, we still see our hospitals use electric shock therapy. Long time for getting appointment for psychiatrists. We see 15-year-olds in psych wards in hospitals. So that's why I was so glad that you announced an additional \$140 million to invest in on the street care mental health care, where you're going to finally have these youth service hubs, one-stop services for our young people. Also having supportive housing and comprehensive psychotherapy. So can you tell us how this is going to help young people –

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, . Thank you to the member from Eglinton- Lawrence for this very, very important question. You know, Mr. Speaker, as Minister of health I believe there can be no health without mental health. It's that important. We need to see and look at mental health and physical health as two sides of the same coin. We need to approach mental health with the same vigour that we do physical health in this province. Mr. Speaker, we have the evidence and we have the partnerships and the dedicated workforce to deliver the type of high-quality mental health services that Ontarians have come to expect for all other aspects of our health care system. It's important that Ontarians understand Mr. Speaker -- and I don't think many of us know this -- that mental illness results in more person years lost to death than all forms of cancer combined. It's that important. And it requires the same level of dedication and the same level of investment, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Colle: Thank you, Speaker. As you know, Minister, I've been very concerned about seeing 12-year-olds in our psych wards. That's no place to help young people with mental health issues, and that's why impressed upon you the need to invest in local services, the service hubs like I told you about down the street here. We have Stella's place where a good friend of mine had her daughter Stella, who suffered mental health illnesses and she had to go to the states. They spent hundreds of thousands of dollars, couldn't get any help there. All they did is give her more drugs. There was no services here in Ontario. So she raised \$10 million of her own money with her friends and built the centre Stella's place, where they're helping young people by the thousands who come in to get mental health care. Can we support more service centres like Stella's place so they can help young people. In the community rather than in the psych wards?

>> Minister Hoskins: Thank you. Again I appreciate the question. The member is correct that we're investing an additional new \$140 million over the next three years. In mental health and more than 50 million annually after that on a

continual basis. Some of the things that we're doing with those funds, we're creating a brand-new provincewide government-funded structured psychotherapy program. We are the first province or territory in the entire country to do so, and this program of structured psychotherapy will provide thousands of Ontarians with evidence based therapies, including cognitive behavioural therapy. I think a lot of people are familiar with that. It's a proven methodology and intervention, particularly useful for those with mood disorders including for example depression. We're also investing in nine new integrated youth service hubs that provide one-stop access to mental health services for people between 12 and 25 and we're investing in an additional 1,150 supportive housing units, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Scott (Barrett) to Minister Hunter Re: Rural/Northern School Closures

>> MPP Laurie Scott: My question is is to the Premier. Many communities have been hit hard by this government's heartless attitude towards their community schools. The Liberal government thinks it's right to close productive schools that are within walking distance from many families and send students away from their communities instead. For example instead of walking, the students at Burlington central high school and Lester p. pearson high school will be forced by this government to take a bus to a different school. At burlg -- as Burlington city councillor Marian mead said this morning -- these closures rip a hole in the heart of their community. Mr. Speaker, will the government call for an immediate moratorium on the closing of community schools?

>> Minister Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, it's important that we have this discussion that, you know, we recognize that these decisions that boards are making and we know how tough the decisions are, are being made in the best interests of our students. And, Mr. Speaker, the ministry has conducted case studies on, you know, what happens following any sort of change like a consolidation or a reorganization across the province. Here's what they found, Mr. Speaker. When all parties in the consolidation or reorganization of schools were engaged in creating a new school culture, encouraging teaching environment was the result. Here's what the student has said. Community engagement in selecting new colours, mascots and the naming of the school encouraged the establishment of a new school identity. This is ensuring that our students --Feel safe, feel welcomed and feel included in their new school community, Mr. Speaker. That's our focus is on student learning and engagement.

>> MPP Toby Barrett: To the Premier. Well, 600 schools are under threat. The Ontario federation of agriculture and Ann Hawkins of oecta have spoken in favour of retaining our small schools. Susan Mack kenzy of alliance against skol cloche -- school closures hit home attacking the school board bait and switch of dumping billions into additions, consolidations. Pointing out the auditor general, however, recommends renewals and maintaining existing schools, which include small schools, not the new infrastructure. Will the Premier restore the value to community and the value to local economy criteria? Premier, place a moratorium on school closures until you fix the formula and until the pupil accommodation review guidelines are fairly rewritten?

>> Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, it's important that we recognize that an arbitrary moratorium would not solve anything, Mr. Speaker. In fact it would take away the ability of a locally elected trustee to make those good decisions on behalf of their schools. In addressing the concerns the member opposite raised with regard to

the auditor general in school renewals, Mr. Speaker, when the Premier first appointed me to this role, that is one of the first opportunities that I had, which was to in fact add \$1.1 billion to school renewals, which met the threshold that the auditor general has asked for. But, Mr. Speaker, when we talked to staff, let's hear what they're saying. We made every effort to hear every concern from students and parents. And by the time the process was over, people felt much more positively. Mr. Speaker, here's a quote from a mayor. There is no doubt there is more access to programs and resources and more opportunities in general for a larger peer group. In this school, I can reach ahead in math, in science. That's from a student --