

MEDIA EVENT: MINISTERS' PRE-CAUCUS SCRUMS

From: "Lepage, Guy (CAB)" <guy.lepage@ontario.ca>
To: "@CAB-QPscrums" <cab-qpscrums@msgov.gov.on.ca>
Cc: "@CAB-Issues" <cab-issues@msgov.gov.on.ca>
Date: Tue, 12 Dec 2017 15:01:09 -0500
Attachments: Dec. 12 - Ministers' Pre-Caucus Scrums.doc (139.78 kB)

MEDIA EVENT: MINISTERS' PRE-CAUCUS SCRUMS

December 12, 2017

Location:

Outside Legislative Chambers

Speakers:

Ministers Hoskins; Naqvi; Sousa; Thibeault; PC Leader Brown; NDP Leader Horwath

Media Attendance:

Print – 9
TV – 5
Radio – 3

Media Outlets:

Jones – CP; Jeffords – CP; Ferguson – Star; Rushowy – Star; Artuso – Sun; Smith Cross – QP Briefing; Hains – QP Briefing; Reynolds – QP Briefing; Smith – QP Today; Crawley - CBC Radio/TV; Lamoureux - Radio Canada TV; Brule - Radio Canada/CJBC; Fitzpatrick – CBC Online; Lewkowicz – Newstalk 1010; Global; Bliss - CTV Ontario; Rath - CHCH Television; Morissette – TFO

Media Questions:

Questions for Minister Hoskins:

All right what's up?

Q: Bliss: The Southlake Hospital in New Market invited me up and they showed me some of their challenges in dealing with overflow of patients. I know you're taking some measure. What relief is available, short term and long term, for hospitals that are experiencing this incredible challenge?

Well we continue to work with all our hospitals are working of course. An important development for South Lake this past weekend we affectively opened up 30 additional spaces in hospital with the creation and the opening of the Finch site of the former Humber River Hospital. There is a reactivation care center there now with 125 beds. It's going to be augmented by I think another 90 early in the new year. These are transitional spaces, rehabilitation spaces, for individuals that are currently in hospital but don't need to be in that acute care environment and can be better cared for this in type of facility at the created Finch site of the former Humber River Hospital. So Southlake on Sunday I need to congratulate the CEO, his entire leadership staff at Southlake moved seamlessly and quite beautifully 30 in- patients from Salt Lake to this new facility. And in addition we have opened up some additional acute care beds at Southlake and the Central LIHN, there are 51 allocated beds and certainly a number of those can and likely will go to Saltlake.

Q: Bliss: Do you think this is enough to enable hospitals in the GTA to handle the flu season crush that is coming. Many are overcapacity now.

We are working very closely with the hospitals but certainly creating 125 this past weekend and a further 90 in the new year at the Humber sight. There are five hospitals that are involved in that effort. And also University Health Network this past weekend as well opened 75 transitional rehabilitation beds here in Toronto to increase their in hospital capacity. So these are changes and additions that were making all across the province. Part of nearly 600 transitional spaces that were created. But in addition to that roughly 12 hundred new acute care across beds right across the province. This is the equivalent of six community care (inaudible).

Q: Bliss: The CEO was pleased with your response to the short term crisis. But she says that you know 10 years out is what the province has to collectively start working on because the aging population and people are living longer. What is the plan for that sort of timetable?

Well absolutely. We need to in our planning precisely that. We are working with the Ontario Hospital Association and individual hospitals and leadership to look about those out years. And certainly Southlake is experiencing high growth in terms of their emergency and inpatient volumes. Also we're seeing other parts of the province, Peel for example, that are experiencing high growth. So that's why we're building a brand new hospital in Vaughan. We just completed a brand new hospital, the Humber River Hospital. A new multibillion dollar hospital in Oakville. A massive addition in Burlington, in Milton. So throughout the GTA as across the province. The new Niagara hospital we have committed to. Just last week or the week before committing to their brand new hospital so we're making those, and it's obvious that it's more than just about the hospital system. It's continuum of care. It's keeping people healthy in the first place, reminding them to get the flu shot because we are expecting a bad season. Keeping them healthy in the first instance.

We need our hospitals to be able to provide that quality of care. We need to provide home care and long term care that people rely on.

Q: Lamoureux: Paramedics are saying that it's a political decision to give the right to fire fighters to give some free hospital care on site, or on scene. Is this a political move? Is it for political reasons?

Well, we're not giving that to firefighters. So, we have indicated that we're going to do a pilot, in two sites, two municipalities, willing municipalities that step forward and say that they would like to engage with this pilot to enable licensed paramedics. Paramedics who could, work is this, are able to, and are working in this province as paramedics, who happen to also be firefighters. We are doing a pilot to enable them for the least complex cases. Often individuals that might be treated and released in the first incidence or don't need emergency care. We're doing two pilots, as I mentioned, to see if by allowing licensed paramedics, who happen to be on a fire truck, who arrive on first on the scene, if they can provide paramedic support as they're licensed to do, to those least complex cases. We want to measure those outcome to see if it's a benefit to the patient. So this is focused entirely on the patient, on that individual who is on scene, and I think we'd find the majority of Ontarians would agree that if there is a licensed paramedic on scene, I don't think that patients are particularly exercised about where that individual arrives in 3DMS or arrives through a fire truck, because often it's simultaneous dispatch. And so I think it's important that if on the least complex cases there's a licensed paramedic that they'd be able to get to work as soon as possible. I think that's important in the context of us proving that that's valuable and useful. We don't know for sure, that's why we're doing the pilot.

Q: Artuso: They can't leave on a fire truck. They can't be transported to hospital on a fire truck. But how would they know necessarily if they need to transport the patient ahead of time?

So these are the lowest acuity, so the simplest cases. Maybe cuts and scrapes. They're not the complex cases, and we know through the dispatch, the nature of the case in the first place. In fact, we're upgrading our software to be able to more accurately predict that. So often in this province we have simultaneous dispatch as well. So the paramedics on the EMS will arrive on scene, and that enables that if there's a paramedic on the fire truck, and again we're just talking about pilots. Two pilots, in willing municipalities to test the concept. So this is not anything at all that we have any plans to roll out across the province. This is specific to two willing municipalities to just piloting, and testing to and seeing if it makes a difference in terms of outcome for patients. But again, that paramedic, if they for example arrive on fire truck can hand over to the paramedic who is on EMS if that's necessary.

Q: Artuso: Could you have oversight for these paramedics? Because of one the points the paramedics made today is that there is an entire system, including your ministry of oversight for them, they're not certain who provides the oversight to paramedics on fire trucks.

So we have oversight of paramedics in this province, there are just under 9,000 paramedics that see about a million calls year. So that oversight will obviously continue, but we're also talking about a pilot. In two willing municipalities, and of course we're going to have tremendous oversight over those two pilots because the whole purpose, and part academic exercise to determine whether it's making a demonstrable difference to those individuals. So I think it's really important that all paramedics across this province, and for that matter fire fighters, understand that what we're talking about are two pilots from willing municipalities where we will test the concept. Because it does exist in other parts of Canada, and around North America. We simply want to either prove or disprove that it's going to benefit patients.

Q: Unidentified: Do you know which two municipalities will be picked?

No.

Q. Unidentified: That will be determined in the next few months? Like when will these pilots start..begin?

Yes. I think the timeline that you've expressed is reasonable.

Questions for Minister Naqvi:

Q. Jones: (inaudible) training schools. It's before the courts now, but I'm just wondering if there's any comment you can provide.

Well, you know, obviously I cannot talk about any matters that is before the courts. But I can – I mean, I can say to you that obviously as a parent and as an Ontarian, you know, my heart goes out to all the children who suffered those abuses. As you know, former Premier McGuinty made a formal apology regarding those abuses. You know, those parents entrusted their children to those institutions and those type of abuses should have never happened, and we will obviously have a lot of lessons to be learned and make sure that that kind of type of abuses never happen in our province.

Q. Ferguson: How are you going to stamp out illegal activity with 40 stores to start with?

Well so, as you know, we just passed the Cannabis Act today that will enable the legalization, the federal legalization of cannabis in Ontario. The legislation that we have passed have very specific powers for our local police to make sure that we put an end to illegal dispensaries, illegal pot stores that have popped up all across the province. There are very strict penalties associated with operating an illegal store selling cannabis. There are restrictions on landlords who knowingly lease their premises to illegal stores that would be selling cannabis. And there is an interim closure authority that the police have asked for also in this bill that will make it easy for our police services across the province to close down these stores as well. As you know, we are also opening 40 new stores by July of 2018, and they will increase up to 150 stores across the province by 2020. But most importantly, starting in July, people will legally also be able to buy cannabis online all across the province, so that service I think will ensure that anybody who wants to legally buy cannabis will have access to online portal.

Q. Rath: Minister, the illegal storefronts represent a relatively small portion of black market. How do you shut down the rest of it? It's nice to talk about shutting down the storefronts, but that's not where the black market thrives.

Well one of our big effort is – and this is not just here in Ontario, but I think it's shared across the country – is to put an end to the illicit market because our number-one priority is as we legalize – as we legalize cannabis, that we protect our youth and make sure that public health and harm reduction remains a paramount thing. The way you do it of course is by making sure that the legal product is a safe product, it is priced competitively so that those who want to use cannabis are able to do so legally through – in case of Ontario – through LCBO.

Q. Jones: The enforcement is largely going to fall to the municipalities. What is your take on sort of how much the province's share of the revenue should go to municipalities? How much will they need to do this large-scale enforcement that you're talking about?

So, you know, we've been consulting and engaged with our municipalities from the very beginning of the process and of course through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. They have been very good partners in the work that we have been doing. Now that we have, of course, clarity from the federal government as to how the revenues, tax revenues, will be shared, allows us to further engage with our municipalities, and the Minister of Finance, Charles Sousa, and I look forward to having those conversations to determine exactly the costs that are associated to enforcement, other regulatory issues, both at the provincial level and at the municipal level, to ensure that we've got the right resources available for everyone as we get close – closer to legalization.

Q. Fitzpatrick: Minister, on Bill 166, voting tomorrow, the transparency part on the ticket allocation, why was that removed from the bill?

So, you know, we brought a very important bill dealing with making sure that we're putting fans first, and making sure that tickets are available to people at an affordable price and they're not just being gouged by these bots. We've done – we've taken a lot of important steps in this legislation, the most important being by putting a cap on the resale market at 50 per cent so nobody can sell tickets more than – and charge over 50 per cent than the original price. We've also brought other transparency requirements [end audio]

Questions for Minister Sousa:

[Joined in progress] It was very good. I enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to meet with my colleagues from across Canada, all of whom share the same concerns about, you know, fighting crime when it comes to illicit activity of marijuana and cannabis. And we came to a conclusion that, I think, will be beneficial in respect to try to combat the illicit use and help our youth, public education, enforcement issues, all the things that matter for us to get this right in the next two years.

Q. Brule: Are you ready to give a share to the municipalities? How is that going to work?

Well, I don't want any to be out of pocket in this respect because the provinces are going to be investing quite a bit. I mean, the ones that are going to bear the majority of the costs will be at the provincial and territorial level. Some municipalities will also be bearing costs as it regards to enforcement and policing. So we have to take that into consideration and facilitate that.

Q. Ferguson: How do you figure out how much to give to the municipalities? How much are they going to get?

Well, we're having consultations with the municipalities now, recognizing that some of them have OPP, some of them do not. Some of them have their own police services. So we have to be mindful of what costs are being borne, how it is that the provinces are providing support for certain municipalities versus others. But regardless, we want the municipalities to have the support needed and I've made commitments to do so. And I'm working with now. I've actually been rolling out phase one and phase two of distribution and supports, with respect to some of those municipalities, that actually do already have illicit dispensaries in their respective communities. So as we combat that we'll work with them to make certain that they also have the resources necessary.

Q. Jeffords: So if a community has more of those illicit dispensaries, will they get more of the funding to (inaudible) enforcement (inaudible)?

Well, I mean, it will be dependent also in terms of what the federal government may provide. They've already said to us they've made commitments in regards to providing roadside safety measures, some controls with training and public education. So I want to be sure that those funds that the federal government have suggested they'll do on the side will, in fact, go towards those municipalities. But absolutely, I want municipalities to be partners in this. They're being imposed by the federal government, as are the provinces. This is their timeline, this is their program. So we just want to make sure we're ready to provide the necessary supports for the communities. And so I'll work with the municipalities to make sure that they (inaudible) compensated.

Q. Ferguson: So is it going to be 50/50?

I haven't speculated on the degree of that support because, as I said, not all municipalities are treated the same. In fact, in other provinces it is oftentimes the province is bearing the majority of the cost. Here in Ontario, we've uploaded quite a bit. But we want to make certain that as we proceed forward the distribution of cannabis and online delivery that those communities are prepared for what may occur. Now, we are going to eliminate costs here, as a result of judicial activity and so forth, and with respect to ticketing and the like. But really the main concern for us isn't amount of revenue because we haven't even suggested what that revenue number is. We're trying to go after the illicit activity and the organized crime that is very prevalent in this, in this sector. So as we proceed to do that, we want to make certain municipalities have the supports they need to combat it.

Q. Bliss: Will all the municipalities (inaudible) get a cut of the revenue or just the ones that are hosting the stores that sell.

Well, I have to be respectful to those municipalities...not all of them will have stores, as you can appreciate, but they will all have online delivery. And even municipalities that are saying, 'we don't want to do this just yet,' well, I also have to be mindful of the fact that they live next to other municipalities that do have delivery of...and will have storefronts. So I'm going to look at ensuring that people in the communities protected, right. This is not about levels of government. It's about individuals that are going to be exposed, about addiction services, about enabling families and children and others, you know, to be safe. Right now, the activity occurs. Right now, the costs are being borne by municipalities and by the province. So we need to ensure that we take proper, measured approaches to ensure that kids aren't buying this in schoolyards, and to ensure that, you know, the solicitation activity is eliminated. And just as it happened during the days of Prohibition, there's bootleggers out there that will continue to exist. We still have to fight

that (inaudible)

Q. Crawley: Minister, now that you know more about the taxation and the price point issues, can you give us a sense of what estimating revenues are going to be?

Well, I can suggest that based on the price point of the marketplace...and we are trying to aim for a price program that will be competitive at ten dollars or less. But the degree of revenues at estimated, the federal government are suggesting maybe around \$450 million dollars annually.

Q: Unidentified: That's Ontario?

That's Canada. And for Ontario, we suspect that of that amount we'll get about 40 per cent of those revenues coming to the province, all of which will not be enough to meet the costs that we're going to incur. So the first few years is going to be all about recovering those costs and ensuring we eliminate the illicit market. And then we'll start talking about, based on that market activity, what kind of demand really exists. Thank you.

Questions for Minister Thibeault:

Q: Jones: He has pointed out an order-in-council that they say directs LDCs to advertise Fair Hydro, the discounts on bills -- is that the case?

Yeah I'd have to see that. But what she's talking about is stuff from way back when, and what I was talking about was the Hydro bill redesign, so I'm not sure what they're talking about but obviously, you know, regulation is part of what are, you know, we would always look at in part of the requirements that we have when we're putting out information for people and as I said in Question Period is, is trying to make sure that people understand clearly what their bills are all about.

Q: Ferguson: (inaudible).... have this on the bills.

Well that's, from my understanding, that's the way it is. It's always been done in terms of even with the debt retirement charge, the keeping the debt retirement charge on the bill even though it said zero for residential customers, needed to go through that whole process. We thought it was important to keep the debt retirement on the bills to allow people to know that it's been eliminated. And what we heard from Hydro One, who did the public consultations and did the focus groups, said that people were angry when they saw that because they thought it was something that was coming back. So as I said, hindsight 20-20. What we're trying to do is make things as clear as possible and sometimes when we're trying to make things clear we made it as clear as mud.

Q: Artuso: (inaudible)...the bill through order-in-council, like if you want something added or taken away or left on the bill?

So, so when it comes to the regulation piece on the bills, and there's a lot of regulations that are on the bill, and that's part of the complexity of that right now is, you know, sometimes we treat people like they're energy experts rather than just trying to understand their bill. And so some of the regulations require that we talk about what is a delivery charge, and you know all of those explanations which again make it as clear as mud. And so, you know we've worked with Hydro One to talk about how we can make bills clear, we've got to the bill redesign committee so we're working on it to try and find ways to make things as clear as possible.

Q: Jones: But aside from just Hydro One, I just want to go back to what I asked at the beginning -- This is an order-in-council that they say was signed by you and Minister Matthews. Are you saying you don't recall that specific one, directing all LDCs to display the same way?

So, so if she's talking about the fair hydro plan, I'm assuming from way back in March, and so I'd have to I'd have to take a look at that again. But when it comes to making sure that, you know, anything that we're putting in to make sure that we're helping people know about the bill reductions would have to come from an order-in-council, that's common practice when it comes to the regulations and that would have been one of those.

Q: Jones: Is putting the discounts on the bills a political move? Certainly it would help your government sort of advertise at every turn, the 25 per cent cut.

Well, also the 8 percent reduction is on there right now, and that was started in January of last year to let people know that that 8 percent reduction came into effect. But you don't see the 17 percent on there in

some bills because we didn't we didn't put that into place. So what I'm assuming what she's talking about is the flyers, so the flyers that we asked some of the LDCs to put into place. So again, it's you know, it's, it's making sure that people can understand their bills and understand what's coming off and what isn't.

Q: Haines: For the \$32 million or \$92 million of the energy overcharging, today in Question Period you said, you know, you're going to make all efforts to try and recoup the \$32 million. But those settlements have already been made. How will you (inaudible)?

So, that \$32 million, many of those are still in discussion with the IESO and the companies. The IESO is still working with many of those companies to try and recoup those dollars.

Q: Ferguson: So hasn't, I mean last week the IESO told me that they were just leaving it because they figured any further recoupment of cash would involve litigation with all the attendant risks. So have they changed their tune on that or has your office directed them to do this -- how did this come about?

From my understanding, is there are some that are still under discussion and others are not, but not all. But there is still some going on I know you need to go.

Q: Ferguson: Is that a Dallas Cowboys (inaudible)?

It is. Don't, I lost a bet to my best friend's son.

Q Haines: How many are still under discussion?

That would be a question to IESO. So my conversation with the IESO is that they're still working with some of the nine that are in there to recoup as much of that \$32 million as they can.

Q: Haines: And what's the timeline of this discussion, do you know?

Some of them have been ongoing for quite some time, others have just started. So, you know, that's something again, that the IESO is working with the groups. And you know, I use the OPG scenario as an example. This was from 2015. They didn't realize that they had ineligible expenses. Once they did, they actually repaid those very quickly and it was resolved in 2015. So those type of programs, I think those type of resolutions and discussion are ongoing. OK, thanks everyone.

Questions for PC Leader Brown:

Q: Jones: What was your reaction to seeing Wynne file a statement of claim yesterday against you?

Well I think it was another Liberal stunt. The fact they gave the statement of claim to you the media and not to me, I think this speaks to the theatrics that Wynne is engaged in. We all know these are diversion techniques. We saw it with the Hydro One fire sale. They announced when this short sighted decision was being made, there have booze in grocery stores. And so the newspaper headlines would be different. They did this on the start of the two Liberal political corruption trials. Where they intentionally rushed the marijuana framework before the police even had their input. as a distraction. And now yesterday they attempt this diversion stunt at the same time you got the FAO report that is an attack on the government's financial numbers and the same day that we have our request to have the OPP look into these inappropriate power executive expenses, \$80 million that has been paid. And I'm calling it out for what it is. It's a diversion tactic.

Q: Jones: It was the deadline though. Yesterday was the deadline. (inaudible) You really think it was only a diversion tactic?

If it wasn't a stunt then why didn't they provide that. I mean why was it provided to the media? And frankly if this wasn't a diversion then why wouldn't Kathleen Wynne agree to our request to have this go to public hearings on expedited timetable? This was a diversion technique. It was a baseless legal threat and it's because Kathleen Wynne doesn't want to talk about her record why she engages in these diversions. She wants to distract the media and distract the public. She doesn't want to talk. But the fact that the legislative oversight says her numbers are wrong. She does want to talk about the credit downgrade. She doesn't want to talk about the fact we're a have not province. And that's why the government is in damage control.

Q: Jones: She says it will all be over though if you just apologized. So that and the diversions?

Frankly yesterday Kathleen Lynch should be apologizing to the people of Ontario herself for the \$80 million in expenses. Inappropriate expenses that they need to recoup by December 31st. I want to recoup this

fiscal year. The fact that you've got expenses for raccoon traps and scuba gear is ridiculous.

Q: Jones: I'm not asking about that though. I'm asking about the lawsuit against you that she says would end if you just said sorry.

The only person who should be apologizing is Kathleen Wynne for these stunts, these theatrics from her own government's record. She should apologize to the people of Ontario for 80 million dollars inappropriate expenses. I don't respond to diversion tactics. If she's really serious about this she'll take it to a public hearing and agree to our request to have it done on an expedited basis.

Q: Crawley: (inaudible) Standing trial. That's what you said. Standing trial.

I made it very clear that this was a diversion tactic. In all my interviews I've made it very clear about my criticism about these two liberal political corruption trials. And we're not going to respond. We're not going to engage in her diversion tactics. We're calling them out for what they are.

Q: Ferguson: But come on Patrick, you're a lawyer; surely you know the difference between standing trial and testifying at a trial.

Kathleen Wynne knows this is a baseless legal threat. She knows it. And it's why, you know, I've asked Kathleen Wynne to have it proceed to a public hearing right away on an expedited basis. You don't need stunts. You don't need rhetoric. What we need is to focus on the fact we've got to get Ontario back on track. And so rather than these distractions, I want the Premier to address the big issues that came up yesterday. She needs to address the fact we've got these expenses that haven't been repaid and the challenging of the Government's numbers.

Q: Bliss: If you want to eliminate this distraction you could do that right now by just clearing the record. Setting the record straight. Why is it so hard for you to come out and acknowledge that she wasn't on trial. This could go away right now.

Listen I've made it very clear, abundantly clear, that it was her closest adviser who was on trial in Sudbury. I made it abundantly clear that in Toronto the criminal proceedings that we still have going under way, it was the Liberal Premier, the former Liberal Premier's Chief of Staff and Deputy Chief of Staff. I've made that abundantly clear. But what I'm not going to respond to is diversion tactics and stunts. This was a stunt. Give it to the media when there's a bad news day for the government. When they don't want to talk about the FAO report. They don't want to talk about \$80 million in inappropriate expenses. This was a stunt. And this government plays the public again and again. That's why I have to say, any time there's significant bad news for the government, whether it was the short sighted Hydro One sale, the fire sale of a public asset. And they bring out, they announce the same day that oh there's going to be booze in the grocery stores. You know and the two Liberal political corruption trials start and oh they're going to rush the marijuana framework. And this, when they've got the FAO with a significant attack on the government's numbers saying that the government's numbers don't add up. You've got this \$80 million of inappropriate expenses that the government is not recouping. They find this stuff. And so I'm calling out Kathleen, the Liberals, for the same old, same old tired distraction games they play. They can't continue to trick the public.

Q: Hains: Why do you want to keep the conversation with Solomon and Singh private?

You'd have to speak to those parties. I can't speculate on that.

Q: Hains: And why spend tens of thousands of dollars on legal costs to keep that conversation private?

You'd have to speak to those parties. I can tell you that when it came to what happened in Hamilton we've been fully cooperative providing all correspondence to those interested.

Q: Brule – [Inaudible]

For the first French question, it is a diversion, it is a distraction by the government. It does not want to keep its promise in the agreement with the government of Quebec, that is a diversion. And, they do not want to talk about their irresponsible spending. They want to avoid discussing the FAO report. That is the reason they did that.

Q: Brule – [Inaudible] Excuse from the Premier?

The person that needs to apologize is Kathleen Wynne for this her inappropriate spending. Expenses, like scuba gear, are ridiculous.

Q: Jones: Why did your party vote against the marijuana bill?

I made it clear that first of all I accept the federal framework there's going to be marijuana legalized in Canada. I just want to make sure that the police have their resources. They've expressed significant reservations that they don't have the resources and equipment right now to keep our streets safe. And the reason I flagged, you know when Wynne pushed this on the same day as the Liberal political corruption trials they did this before they had done their due diligence. The police were going to testify in Ottawa the week after. You rush it and you miss that important public policy obligation. I'm going to continue to say that they need to address this. Because I'm worried that we're going to fail our obligation to the people Ontario. The Premier is going to fail her obligation to people of Ontario to make sure our streets are safe.

Q: Ferguson: Do you meant there's not enough money here?

Yes the police associations have made it very clear that they don't have the resources and equipment to keep our streets safe. The government hasn't been speaking to them. The government hasn't satisfied their concerns. When I have police saying that they're worried about keeping our streets safe. I want Kathleen Wynne to address that. I want to make sure that we provide the resources and equipment to the police That we're not going to have significant drug impaired driving in the province of Ontario. Frankly there's a false impression out there, in terms of drug impaired driving, and it's something that I'm concerned about. And I know our first responders are as well.

Questions for NDP Leader Horwath:

[Joined in Progress] Raise the alarm bells, it's not just the New Democrats that believe this is a problem, this is a partisan messaging both on the bills and as inserts and as such it should be paid for by the Liberal Party, not by the people of Ontario. And the fact that the Liberals refused to acknowledge that it is you know it's just not fair to Ontarians that that public monies being used for partisan political purposes by the Liberals. And again, it adds insult to injury that the very chair of the Liberal election campaign, Minister Deb Matthews, the Deputy Premier, signed off on this partisan advertising. Absolutely inappropriate.

Q: Jeffords: Is there any way to know, just based on the order of council, what this will cost people?

Well there's nothing in the order of council that costs out, as far as I know, we have copies of it we're happy to provide it for you. But I think people understand that you should not use public money for partisan purposes. The governing party should not be using public money to, you know to help it send a political message to the people of Ontario. That's what they're doing with these inserts. That's what they're doing with these messages on the bills. And it's absolutely the wrong thing to do.

Q: Artuso: What is it about what's written down that you find is very political or partisan, like what sort of wording is it that that concerns you the most?

Well it goes through an absolute list of the requirements they must talk about the fair hydro plan, they must talk about the 25 percent reduction, they must do this, they must do that. It's an edict to the local distribution companies across this province that says you must tell the Liberal story in the hydro bills. Totally unacceptable.

Q: Jeffords: Andrea it seems like an usual way to advertise, is it a way to get around advertising rules?

Absolutely. It's absolutely a way to not only get around the advertising rules but it's a way to use public money to politically advertise, which should not be happening. So it gets around the rules, but it also uses, you know, public dollars to do political advertising it's absolutely unacceptable.

Q: Artuso: Do you have any thoughts on the paramedics issue because it's unusual for first responders -- first responders to come out to complain about another group of first responders. So what do you think about what's happening there?

It's really, really unusual to see that and I mean what I think it shows is that, you know, Kathleen Wynne is gone on a path it's creating division once again and that's, that's never a good thing for Ontarians to see this kind of division happen.

Q: Global: You must have an opinion on the situation with this lawsuit being dropped yesterday with all the [inaudible] that is going on. Your thoughts on this.

This is the --the hundred thousand dollar. OK look at. I have to say it's very frustrating to be here in the legislature when people are struggling to pay their bills, when people are lined up in stretchers in hospitals and all that Kathleen Wynne and Patrick Brown seem to be able talk to talk about is each other. It's like a schoolyard spat. And frankly there are much more important things for the people of Ontario to have the

leaders talk about as opposed to, you know, a who's right and who's wrong when it comes to you know a lawsuit. It's very, very disappointing all the way around and let's face it we should be talking about the things that matter to Ontarians and not, you know, whether Kathleen Wynne is going to give Patrick Brown a black eye.

Q: Jeffords: Andrea what do you think about the excise tax agreement for pot sales, is that 75% share a good deal for Ontario? Ostensibly it seems to be.

Well, I mean, I think the more important question is what's going to happen to the municipalities in terms of their ability to deal with what they see is something that's going to be a significant impact on their communities. And so in terms of the costs of things like policing services, their, you know, licensing perhaps, building inspections, all those kinds of things. We know that municipalities are already struggling with downloading that the Conservatives did and it has not been completely addressed by the Liberals. And so anything that adds costs to their bills is going to be a problem. So again, it's really shocking though that here we are six months from this new regime to be in place and we have more questions than answers. I mean, we still don't know what the cost is going to be or what the pricing levels are going to be. We don't know what the municipalities are going to see in terms of financial help. We do -- what we do know is that 40 shops across the province is not going to deal with the criminal element problem that we have, it's going to be an open season, frankly, for the criminal element with only 40 storefronts going up in this province, so lots of concerns still exist and lots of questions remain unanswered.

Q: Bliss: Andrea about the hospitals with overcrowding, up in South Lake they've converted an auditorium, a gym, they said that they've had to put patients in family waiting rooms and staff lounges, government's opened up a secondary hospital, but no relief --

It's not going -- it's not even going to scratch the surface of what families are facing in our hospital system. I mean, they have squeezed the hospitals to a point of no return at this point. I mean, there are people all over the GTA, all over the province of Ontario in stretchers in in the most unaccommodating places and so whether that's a gymnasium, or a lounge, or, you know, in some cases shower rooms. I mean good on Southlake hospital for going public with this because we've been raising this issue for a long time. We've talked to a lot of folks and been in a lot of hospitals to try to raise the alarm bells but this is a wholly inadequate response and we're in this mess specifically because the Liberals have been cutting back on our hospitals. Look, hospitals are a basic service that people expect to have they have an ability to access when they need it the most. To have people, you know, even being turned away from hospitals now in our province is worrisome and we're at the beginning of the flu season and I just I shudder to think of what might be happening in this province over the next couple of months. It is completely irresponsible for this government to have put us in this mess and it's people's lives that we're talking about, its families and people's lives, it's a terrible situation.

Q: Bliss: Where does the money come from? To provide relief its billions --

But I mean not only to provide relief, but look the time it takes to make sure that that relief is effective is a worry. I mean, the government can throw money at this but they've caused such a problem in the system that even professionals in the system are saying even with the extra money we can't hire people, we can't hire the staff to take on temporary jobs for temporary beds. It is, you know, the Minister of Health criticized me for calling it a crisis. He said Oh you're calling everything a crisis. It's not just me. Now the CEO's of hospitals are calling it a crisis. It is a crisis, but it's a crisis that was created by government. They thought that they could cut back on those hospital budgets for ten years. That's what they've done for a decade. They've been squeezing those hospital budgets and now we're reaping the results of that wrongheaded move that the Liberals undertook for those 10 years.

Q: Fitzpatrick: On Bill 166 tomorrow are you supporting it or voting against it and I'm particularly interested in what you think of the ticket sales act?

Well, you know, it's really frustrating I think this is like the third time at least that the Liberals have brought something forward to try to address this problem. What we still see is people not being able to afford or even get access to the tickets that that are being, you know, are being given away to others or kept separate for other interests to get a hold of them before everyday families can. I mean people can't even take their kids to the hockey game. So I haven't -- I don't have much faith in what the government is doing this time because the last two or three times they went at it they didn't fix it for families.

Q: Fitzpatrick: Are you going to vote for it or against it?

Well I'm actually, I'm not, I'm not positive what, our what our final decision is on that bill at this point. I mean, to be honest with you -- we're going to be voting against it. There you go. Because it just doesn't do

enough. I mean, again, I don't see it actually solving the problem it's I get, it's the third attack at this by the Liberals at least and we just don't have a lot of confidence that, I mean, that's the big issue that they're still going to be big blocks of tickets that are not going to be accessible and we don't know and we don't know and we don't know who those tickets are going to. Right so it's very worrisome. Again, do we think that people need to be getting better access to tickets at a regular price and not inflated prices? Absolutely. Do we think that this government has done enough in this bill to ensure that people get access to the, you know, to the events that they want to attend and they want to take their families to? We don't think it does. We don't think it hits the mark.

Q: Jeffords: Andrea I just wanted to be clear about the order in council, so is it in regards to the language on the bills itself or the inserted flyers?

It's both. It requires local distribution companies to put information on the bills and as inserts and then it lists out all of the details about what needs to be in that information, it needs to promote and advertise the government's Fair Hydro Plan, it needs to talk about the 25 percent reduction, it needs to talk about the 8 percent HST, you know, rebates that they've -- that we forced them to do, you know, a year ago and so it's very obviously partisan in it's nature and it forces the local distribution companies or your local hydro company to put that information in the hydro bills.

Q: Ferguson: I missed it earlier, I know you voted in favour, the caucus voted in favour, on the cannabis bill but do you have any reservations on that?

Well it's obvious even today there are still so many unanswered questions. I mean, we don't know what the price point is, we don't know, you know, what's going to happen in terms of municipalities and how much they're going to be able to get support from the government. We do know municipalities are worried about the impact on their budgets in terms of taking -- taking some responsibility around policing and all of those pieces. But what we know for sure is that 40 storefronts is not going to deal with you know the criminal element that we have here in the province. In fact, 40 storefronts basically tells the criminal element it's wide open season for marijuana here in Ontario and I don't think that that's very responsible.

Q: Ferguson: Okay that said, why vote for it then if you have those reservations?

Well because, I mean, because we know that it's coming to Ontario, we know that across Canada there's going to be access to legalized marijuana. That's something that we support. In fact New Democrats for many, many decades have been saying that marijuana should be decriminalized in our in our in our country as well as our province and so that's, so this is a step towards that. But --and the Government's basically forced to put something -- some kind of regime in place. The problem is they've been dragging their feet and there are still so many unanswered questions. So yes we support you know the general, you know, implementation that needs to happen but not the specifics of what the Government's done because at this point there are still so many questions.

N.B.: Comments captured are not verbatim quotes

Prepared by:

Guy Lepage, Senior Issues Analyst
Jonathan Colford, Senior Issues Analyst
Ann Doose, Senior Issues Analyst
Rob Di Giovanni, Coordinator, Media Monitoring
Cindy Basha, Issues Assistant
Rachel Jonsson, Research and Administrative Coordinator
Craig Sumi, Manager, Corporate Issues

