

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Thursday, December 7, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Thursday, December 7, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

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MPP MacLeod to Minister Duguid Re: Auditor General Report

>> MPP MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker. Merry Christmas and thank you for your wonderful party last night for all of our deserving staff. My question is to the president of the treasury board. There were some astonishing details in yesterday's auditor general's report. Nine companies billed ratepayers \$260 million in ineligible expenses. Only \$160 million was recovered. Ratepayers are still on the hook for an astonishing \$80 million. That's unacceptable. The money must be returned to the treasury board president. Will the Liberals guarantee every cent is repaid by the end of the year, by December 31st?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to respond again to this issue. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, the ieso caught on to what looked like some form of exploitation happening to their program. They did some in-depth work over a number of years, Mr. Speaker. They've recovered I believe it's two thirds in total of the dollars that they deemed to be ineligible. Many of these ineligible costs were in dispute with the companies, Mr. Speaker, so it wasn't a case where the companies agreed that all of these costs were ineligible. So there was a negotiation that took place and, Mr. Speaker, the ieso had I believe it's \$168 million that was repaid. Because that's the amount they thought appropriate given the discussions they had with the companies.

>> MPP MacLeod: Thanks, Speaker. The ieso didn't catch on. They got caught. What were these companies using ratepayer money for? Wealthy executives and Liberal insiders were expensing Raccoon traps and scuba gear. Mr. Speaker, only this Liberal government would let wealthy executives expense Raccoon traps while ratepayers are afraid to open their bills. When will the money be paid back? By December 31st.

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, as I said the money has been reimbursed, Mr. Speaker. There was some dollars that were in dispute. There was ineligible costs that were identified. The ieso did what they ought to do, Mr. Speaker. They investigated. One of the companies was fined \$10 million, Mr. Speaker. They take this seriously. There is no excuse, Mr. Speaker, for any company to try to exploit any system that's been set in place. But I do say, Mr. Speaker, and I say this sincerely. When a company has the ability to exploit a system, it means there are issues with the system and that's why the ieso has also strengthened the system, in particular the definition of what eligible and ineligible costs are to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that this can never happen again.

>> MPP MacLeod: Scandal started out four Minister s and two Premiersing a and it's still ongoing and we're still looking for \$80 million, Speaker. I've seen a lot over my time at queen's park, billions wasted here, billions wasted there, but yesterday was different. Yesterday was something else. The auditor revealed, while seniors saw their power disconnected in the dead of winter, wealthy executives were expensing thousands of dollars' worth of luxuries. I am not sure which was worse, if it was the car washes, the Raccoon traps, the landscaping, the coveralls, the overalls, parkas or scuba gear all expensed by wealthy executives and Liberal insiders out of the wallets of ratepayers. Mr. Speaker, the egregious abuse of tax pail dollars is astonishing. How long was the Liberal government. Going to go to allow their insider friends to expense gear like scuba gear and Raccoon traps? Answer me that.

>> Minister Duguid: The so-called Liberal insiders that the moment's referring to has donated to that party well over \$100,000, Mr. Speaker. So if anything they're P.C. Insiders. So maybe we should be more concerned, Mr. Speaker, because they certainly are more P.C. Insiders than they are Liberal insiders. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, if the member wants to politicize this, so be it. I'll go there too. That party knows a thing or two about gaming, Mr. Speaker. They know a thing or two about exploiting. When you look at their tabloid document that looks more like a teen beat magazine than it does a platform, Mr. Speaker. You see on the front of that document a claim that they're cutting income tax by 22-point-something percent. Mr. Speaker, they're doing none of the sort. It's a bogus tax cut they're promising, Mr. Speaker. That's what I call exploitation.

MPP Smith to Minister Duguid Re: Auditor General Report

>> MPP Todd Smith: Thanks, Speaker. My question this morning is for the acting Premier. The government's panel to write new rules for the electricity system is seriously compromised. We know from the auditor's report yesterday that no fewer than five members of the panel put together by the government either broke existing market rules or were under investigation while they were helping write the new rules for the electricity system. We know that only two members, including one of the co-chairs, was identified by name. Three more companies who gamed the system for a combined \$78 million remain unnamed. So, Speaker, how is it that five government insiders were able to game the system for hundreds of millions of dollars and this government then rewards them by putting them in charge of writing new rules for the electricity system?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: For the life of me, I don't know why the P.C.S always want to refer to P.C. Insiders as Liberal insiders, because they continue to do that. The fact that they're frivolously referring to actually donate over \$100,000 to the P.C. Party, Mr. Speaker. If they want to get political with this, so be it. This panel's a very important panel. Two members have resigned from the panel that were involved with some of the companies, that were deemed to have been exploitive of the previous system, Mr. Speaker. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, a number of these costs are in dispute with these companies, and that's fair enough. So, Mr. Speaker, what's important is this panel's recommendation and the market renewal system that this panel's working on that's going to ensure that we have an even more efficient system, Mr. Speaker, put into place by 2019, which is the work that's being done to ensure that we continue to have -- Not only a strong reliable system, Mr. Speaker, but an affordable system as well.

>> MPP Smith: Back to the Minister, Speaker. All we know from the auditor's report is that one of the three unnamed companies is a generator. It sounds like the Minister knows who we're talking about, so why won't he share these names with us this morning? The company that filed \$51 million in inappropriate expenses that ratepayers ended up paying for. This is a serious, serious issue, Speaker. We know that these companies are fighting to keep some of the expenses they claim. But we don't know who they are. We want to know who they are. Again the Minister knows who they are. We don't even know if they're still helping write the new rules or if there's another convenient resignation on the way like we saw Friday. >> Thank you, speaker. The IESO's website has been changed this week. So we no longer know who the current members are. Mr. Speaker, why is the government hiding its own incompetence if you know who they are, minister, please tell us who they are. Thank you, Speaker. The IESO's website has been changed this week. So we no longer know who the current members are. Mr. Speaker, why is the government hiding its own incompetence if you know who they are, Minister, please tell us who they are.

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, two members have resigned from the panel that were part of companies that were indeed considered to be exploitive of the system. The members of the panel are public knowledge, Mr. Speaker, so the member -- it's all public knowledge. But there's an additional member that's been appointed to the panel, Mr. Speaker, and this comes out of the auditor general's recommendations. We've now appointed a consumer advocate to the panel, Mr. Speaker, who's actually an energy affordability, energy low income consumer advocate that will help ensure that voice is also heard on this panel. So this is a strong panel with very good expertise on it that's providing good advice. Ontario energy board has indicated that the work that's being done by this panel has been very, very valuable. The P.C.S -- Work that goes into building a clean, reliable, affordable energy system because they know nothing about that, Mr. Speaker. But we do.

>> MPP Smith: Speaker, I don't think the Minister understands the seriousness of this issue. Hundreds of millions of dollars, hundreds of millions of dollars ended up on the bills of hydro customers in Ontario. This is the second Liberal gas plant scandal, Speaker. It's not just the second Liberal scandal. It's the second Liberal parked scandal we've seen here at Queen's Park in the last couple of months. Four Ministers, including this one, and two Premiers received no fewer than ten

warnings from the O.E.B. Since 2009 on this issue and they did nothing about it. No one did anything. Two of the Ministers are still in Cabinet, including the one who's taking the questions this morning. He knew these companies were under investigation. If he didn't, he should have known and somehow these same people that were gaming the system are writing the government's new rules on market renewal anyway. So, Speaker, will the government finally show some accountability, come clean and tell us who these insiders are that are creating the new rules that they broke?

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, the P.C. insiders are public knowledge, Mr. Speaker. Their donations to the P.C. Party -- The donations to the P.C. Party of over, Mr. Speaker, \$116,149, right on their website. Public knowledge, Mr. Speaker. I don't know why the member's too lazy to go to the website to get the names of the folks on that committee. They're right there, Mr. Speaker. They're not hidden. There's a new member that's just been appointed, Mr. Speaker. Who's going to be a voice for those residents that this government has spoken to in many, many ways -- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This new member of the panel, who will speak for people of low income ratepayers across this province speaks to the folks that we're giving a voice to as government, Mr. Speaker. With their minimum wage policy, with their 25% off energy rates and with our workplaces to ensure that --

MPP Vanthof to Minister Duguid Re: Auditor General Report

>> MPP John Vanthof: Thank you. My question's to the acting Premier. Yesterday the A.G. confirmed that the Premier's allowed private power companies to rip off Ontario families to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. From the privatization of power generation by the Conservatives to the sell-off of Hydro One by Kathleen Wynne, the system now seems to be set up to make cash cows of ordinary Ontario families, cash cows for private energy companies. When will this Liberal government wake up, realize that our electricity system is broken and actually do something to stop private power companies from stealing from the families of Ontario?

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I think I've been incredibly forthright about this for the last few days in my answers to the members opposite. So, Mr. Speaker, I think I need to go beyond that. I believe that that party, Mr. Speaker, just can't help but speak about -- they have to mention the word privatization 20 times a day. Mr. Speaker, I think what they want to bring to the energy system is an archaic philosophical perspective. What they want to do and what they're saying and what their policy is is for us to socialize the entire energy system in the province of Ontario. Man what it would cost for the government to buy out Bruce nuclear. Tens every billions of dollars that party wants to cost ratepayers or taxpayers across this province, and that's on top of their wacky scheme to buy back shares of Hydro One that will also cost at least \$10 billion, maybe more, Mr. Speaker. We're talking 10, 20, \$30 billion of costs on the taxpayers of this province, on the ratepayers of this province. To businesses in this province.

>> MPP Vanthof: Under the Liberal government, Ontario's electricity system contains programs that are paying gas generating hydro companies \$30 million more than necessary each and every year. People are suffering in Ontario. Hydro rates have gone up by more than 300% under the Liberals, and some families are being forced to choose whether to heat or eat. Why is this government allowing private power companies to defraud hardworking families who are already struggling?

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, this party's talking about rising energy rates? Imagine what's going to happen to our energy rates when you waste \$10 billion, waste \$10 billion with zero public benefits, zero savings, Mr. Speaker, just to fulfil their philosophical ideas. Waste tens of billions of dollars, Mr. Speaker. \$10 billion to fulfil their philosophical idea to buy back Hydro One with zero benefit to the people of this province and the ratepayers of this province, as well as spend tens every billions of dollars to purchase the energy projects, Mr. Speaker. That are currently private across this province, with again no benefit to taxpayers. They would destroy our fiscal situation and our economy.

>> MPP Vanthof: The auditor general identified another government program that costs families and

businesses \$19 million over just one year. For most families who are struggling, that money is the difference between having heat this winter or not. Why has this Liberal government repeatedly ignored the warnings about private hydro companies gaming the system and leaving the people of Ontario to pay the price?

>> Minister Duguid: I'm not sure what other program the member's referring to, Mr. Speaker, but it's a fairly general question. But I'll go back to where I went in my first response. It's one thing to ask questions -- and this is Auditor General day so we know it's a good day for the opposition. There's lots of material for them to come at us --

And that's part -- that's part of the accountability of the system that we have here, Mr. Speaker. But they also have to be accountable for what they stand for. And right now this party has a policy that will cost this province \$10 billion of waste, Mr. Speaker, to buy back shares of Hydro One with no benefit to the people of this province -- Meanwhile, Mr. Speaker, we are working diligently to do everything we can to bring down the costs of energy in this province. We're providing people with a 25% cut in their energy rates, which is in part because we're working hard to bring down the costs. We've also built a clean and reliable system, Mr. Speaker, that's the envy of North America, something everybody in this province could be very, very proud of.

MPP Vanthof to Minister Duguid Re: Auditor General Report

>> MPP John Vanthof: To the acting Premier. Earlier this week we learned about a private gas plant in Brampton that stole over \$100 million from Ontarians. Yesterday the A.G. said there are eight other power producers could be gaming the Liberal system at a cost of \$260 million to the province of Ontario. But only 168 million of that has been recovered from these companies. What is the government doing to force private gas companies to pay the full amount back to the people of Ontario who are actually overpaying their hydro bills because they're failing to. Regulate the --

>> Minister Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that question, Mr. Speaker, and I think I've explained it but I'll explain it once again. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that there were some companies that were exploiting the system that was in place. And, Mr. Speaker, IESO did a very thorough investigation of that. They've determined one that the member mentioned, Goreway, that has been fined \$10 million. The vast majority of the funds have been repaid, Mr. Speaker. Some of those funds were in dispute. They were deemed ineligible by the folks at IESO but the companies were in disagreement with them. There were some cases where some of those costs, Mr. Speaker, may not have been as clear as they needed to be and that's why the IESO strengthened the system and the definition of what eligible costs are. So they negotiated a settlement with those companies that they deemed to be fair to -- Ratepayers but also, Mr. Speaker, fair to the companies.

>> MPP Vanthof: I wonder if the Raccoon traps are in dispute. The 260 million consist of claims for things like staff car washes, carpet cleaning, scuba gear and Raccoon traps. And that \$260 million represents 40% of the claims paid out by this one government program between 2009 and 2015. That means that nearly half the claims OK'd by electricity regulators under this Liberal government program could be fraudulent and had nothing to do with generation of electricity at all. When will this government finally realize that privatization of our energy system is hurting, is penalizing the people of Ontario?

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, some of the costs the member referred to were pretty obviously not eligible costs, and they're the ones that would have been paid back, Mr. Speaker, and rightfully so. And Goreway of course was fined \$10 million on top of that because there was a very obvious example of exploiting the system that was in place. The key is, Mr. Speaker, when these things are identified that government agencies like the IESO identify the problem, investigate thoroughly as they recover the dollars that ought to have been recovered, Mr. Speaker, and the I.C.E.O. have done that. They've negotiated with these companies to ensure the funds they deem should be recovered should be recovered and, Mr. Speaker, they've changed the system to ensure

that in fact -- strengthened the system. To make sure this won't happen again. I think on the surface, Mr. Speaker, that's a good approach. It's unfortunate this has happened but the iso has learned from it.

>> MPP Vanthof: New Democrats put out a detailed plan almost a year ago prior to the electricity system to work in favour of Ontario families. And now we have the P.C. Hydro plan which has basically splad some blue paint on the \$40 billion Liberal borrowing plan. Only new Democrats are ready to tackle this problem and bring down rates. Why isn't the government?

>> Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to defend the P.C. Hydro plan but certainly, Mr. Speaker, we have a plan to build a clean, reliable, affordable energy system in this province. By contrast, Mr. Speaker, what the NDP Are putting on the table for people is to waste \$10 billion, maybe more, Mr. Speaker, to buy back shares of Hydro One and, Mr. Speaker, with absolutely no benefit whatsoever to the people of this province. Absolutely no benefit whatsoever to the energy system, Mr. Speaker. At the same time they want to buy out all the private suppliers in Ontario that have been here, many of them a very long time. That's going to cost tens of billions of dollars so we're talking 30, \$40 billion that either going to come off the tax base. Or they're going to hit hydro ratepayers with incredible rate hikes, Mr. Speaker. Families, businesses. They would destroy our economy, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Jones to Minister Sandals Re: Auditor General Report

>> MPP Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Deputy Premier. The auditor general has reported that the Wynne Liberals have spent \$17.4 million on government advertising. The auditor says that the primary goal of these ads were to, quote, foster a positive impression of the government parties. These include a \$3 million infrastructure campaign which the auditor said were self-congratulatory and aimed at ensuring the government gets credit for its potential future spending plans. \$17.4 million is a 33% jump in advertising in a single year. Are Ontarians to take it as a coincidence that the government has increased this advertising budget by 33% the year before an election?

>> Minister Liz Sandals: Yes, thank you very much and I'm very pleased to respond to the question and to the report from the auditor general. And I'd like to begin by noting that of course we are and continue to be the only province in Canada that actually has government advertising legislation. I also want to talk a little bit about the numbers, because it is true that the numbers increased from last year's estimate. But that's because, primarily because that there was -- Primarily because money that had previously been in ministry advertising lines were consolidated into the central advertising line. So when you actually compare apples to apples. Then you find out that in fact there was only a \$6 million increase in the advertising budget and I would be happy to explain that.

>> MPP Jones: She needs to explain it to the auditor. The government continues to claim that they are complying with the legislation but they neglect to mention that they were the ones who watered down the legislation, and it actually weakens the auditor general's oversight. The A.G. Report shows that there is a massive loophole in government legislation. The loophole has allowed the government to spend nearly \$5 million on digital ads, social media, with zero approval needed from the auditor general. That is why under the people's guarantee Patrick Brown and the P.C. Government will return the auditor general's oversight -- Will you commit to doing the same?

>> Minister Sandals: So if we could just sort out some accurate information about the legislation, the original legislation which they support did not give the -- Did not give the auditor the authority to review. The legislation which does give the auditor the authority to review digital advertising is our revised legislation which currently exists. So to go back to what I was saying before, it is true that there is a \$6 million increase in the bulk media buy line this year. That is related to the fact that we are translating into more languages. It is related to the fact that we insisted all government advertising be compliant with the Ontario disabilities act. And that in fact the cost of digital advertising has gone up. Not because so much the volume has gone up, but just that the cost of

placing an ad in digital media has gone up because of the more --

MPP Gelinas to Minister Hoskins Re: Auditor General Report

>> MPP France Gelinas: Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [End of Translation] Acting Premier. Yesterday the auditor general revealed that 16 p3 hospitals where the ongoing maintenance and repairs have been privatized by this Liberal government and the Conservatives before them, those hospitals are being forced to take money from nursing and frontline care to cover millions of dollars in maintenance costs that the private contractor refuses to cover. Every hospital that the auditor general contacted told her the exact same thing. They are not seeing the benefits that were promised under this privatized model. How can this government force our hospitals to take money away from nursing and frontline care just to mask the failure of this health care privatization scheme?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the auditor general's report. I said yesterday that I accept all of her recommendations as they pertain to health care. But I want to talk about another report, Mr. Speaker, that came out this morning from the Fraser institute. You've got to love the Fraser institute. So Fraser institute just came out this morning finds that Ontario has the best wait times in the country. Once again, Mr. Speaker. In fact four weeks better than the next closest province and only one of only two provinces in Canada to actually improve wait times from 2016 to 2017, Mr. Speaker. We have the shortest wait times from G.P. To specialist. We have the shortest wait times from specialist to treatment. We have the shortest wait times for C.T. Scans, Mr. Speaker. We have the shortest wait times for M.R.I.S, and I'm really happy I have a supplementary because it's a long list, Mr. Speaker .

>>MPP Gelinas: Back to the acting Premier. Those p3 contracts were supposed to cover all hospital maintenance costs. That was the entire point of signing those contracts. But now hospitals are being forced to divert their operating funds, funds that this Liberal government froze for four years straight, money meant to hire nurses, open up new beds, cut wait times, provide quality care. That money is instead being diverted to pay private companies that won't hold up their end of the deal, that refuse to do the work. Why is this government forcing people to wait longer in our hospital system, forcing nurses to work without the proper staffing levels instead of stopping this massive failure of this health care privatization scheme?

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, again I appreciate the report. We invested over \$1 billion over the last two years in our hospitals for their operating budgets, Mr. Speaker. We've invested \$1.3 billion additional dollars over the next three years for wait times. The member opposite spoke about wait times twice in that supplementary. We have, Mr. Speaker, according to the Fraser institute just this morning the shortest wait times in the country for ultrasounds. The shortest wait times in the country for radiation oncology. The shortest wait times in the country for general surgery. The shortest wait times for gynaecological procedures, Mr. Speaker. The shortest wait times for ears, nose and throat. The shortest wait time for colonoscopy, Mr. Speaker. The shortest wait times for treatment for breast cancer. Shortest wait times for treatment for lung cancer. Cancer of the cervix, cancer of the larynx and prostate cancer. Congratulations --

MPP Qaadri to Minister Ballard Re: Cap-and-Trade

>> MPP Shafiq Qaadri: [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of the environment and climate change. The Honourable Chris Ballard. Speaker, yesterday we announced the results of our fourth carbon market auction. The auction generated more than \$420 million bringing the total proceeds for this year to \$1.9 billion. Speaker,

you'll be pleased to know that our government guarantees that 100% of these proceeds will be reinvested in programs that will help Ontarians make more sustainable and affordable choices. Funding for projects like the go regional express rail, repairs to schools, hospitals and social housing, new bike lanes and energy-efficient home retrofits. Speaker, can the Minister please explain to this chamber more about the green investment that we're able to make through the proceeds of our cap on pollution?

>> Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you to the member from Etobicoke North for that important question. And as a medical doctor, I know that he really understands the importance of making sure that the province fights for clean air, clean water and clean land. Mr. Speaker, the results of the latest auction show that our plan is functioning as designed. Businesses across the province are engaged in the market. As the member mentioned the auctions from our carbon market have generated a total of \$1.9 billion this year alone. Speaker, by legislation every dollar collected is being reinvested in projects that fight climate change. Earlier this week the Minister of transportation announced that we're providing \$93 million of cycling infrastructure to municipalities across the province. Last week I announced \$64 million. For hospital energy efficiency. Speaker, our plan is focused on investing in Ontario's future and creating a more fair society where we all benefit from clean air.

>> MPP Qaadri: Thank you, Minister. Speaker, parties recognize our plan is creating fairness and opportunity for Ontarians by investing in a greener future for our province. Earlier this week, we saw expert analysis that reveals that the leader of the opposition's new carbon tax scheme would in fact cost more but do less for Ontario families than our current plan. The enviro economics analysis shows our plan will reduce greenhouse gases by 82.2 mega tonnes by 2022. The P.C. leader's new carbon taxes in fact do far less, reducing emissions by just 28.8 mega tonnes. The difference is equivalent to taking more than 11 million cars off the road. The new report from the enviro, cap emissions from businesses almost three times as effective and comes at half the cost. [Speaking in French] Voice of Translator: Could you talk about the measures from our government –

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you again to the member for that question. Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to speak about real guarantees, not flip-flop guarantees. Our cap on pollution guarantees real emissions reductions that will improve the air quality, reduce Ontario's carbon footprint, and it guarantees this is will come at the cheapest price possible for families and businesses. Speaker, the same economist the P.C. Cited a few weeks ago in their glossy magazine said our cap-and-trade program would drive down emissions nearly three times more, three times more than their carbon tax scheme would. It appears the Conservatives have cherry picked the numbers in their schemes, Speaker. This same expert analysis shows the Conservative carbon taxes also more expensive. Costing Ontario families and businesses a total of \$15.1 billion. Meanwhile, Speaker, our plan guarantees three times more savings.

MPP Jones to Minister Lalonde Re: Auditor General Report

>> MPP Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of community safety. Yesterday we learned from the auditor general that the Cabinet committee on emergency management has not met for several years and that the last provincial risk assessment was done six years ago based on data from 2009. The A.G. Says that as a result Ontario is simply not prepared to deal with large large-scale emergencies. Emergency management staff are untrained. They have large turnover and a major I.T. Project has been bungled. What an unbelievable failure on the part of this Premier and this government. Protecting the safety and security of its citizens is the first and most important responsibility of any government. Why does it take an auditor general's report for this government -- To realize that they have no emergency plan to keep 14 million Ontarians safe?

>> Minister Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much for the member opposite for the question. Because I want to reassure Ontarians, and let me be very clear, Mr. Speaker. We can respond to emergencies, and we have responded to emergencies. And the auditor general agrees with that.

Couldn't our emergency response be more efficient? Yes. This is why we recently launched our new emergency management action plan. Our plan is based on an earlier independent review, and we were actually very pleased to see that the finding of our review are consistent with the auditor general's comments and recommendation. We know that emergencies and disasters are happening with greater frequency around the world, and while they are maybe rare in Ontario, we know we must -- Proactive and prepared. We are also, for the member opposite to know, we are recruiting our new first chief of emergency management to champion -- Facing.

>> MPP Jones: Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister. When this same question was asked of the Minister by a reporter yesterday, she responded by talking about climate change. What about terrorism? What about cyber threats? What about disaster prevention, mitigation and recovery? The shocking thing is this government's Cabinet committee didn't even meet to prepare for the pan am games or g-20. They sat on their hands for more than five years and now they explain they are working on it. It's ridiculous. Given the dangers in the world today, when will the government finally get around to fixing these huge holes in our province's emergency management system?

>> Minister Lalonde: I'm very happy again by the chance to talk about the comments raised by the member opposite. Mr. Speaker, again over the past five years our Cabinet committee of emergency management has been engaged on a number of emergencies. These include the 2012 forest fires in northern Ontario. The 2013 storm...
[Transcription cut out]

MPP Gretzky to Minister Milczyn Re: Auditor General Report

>> MPP Lisa Gretzky: [Transcription Cut Out Beginning]...Could anyone in this House hold on that long before their families had a safe, secure place to live? Speaker, why has this Liberal government refused to ensure there is enough social housing to meet the needs of struggling Ontario families?

>> Minister Peter Milczyn: Thank you, Speaker. I'm very pleased with the quo from the member opposite. And, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what we have been doing for social housing. During our period in government, 20,000 units of affordable housing have been built in this province. Mr. Speaker, specifically to the member opposite. During that period of time 320 new units of affordable housing in Windsor have been created. Almost 6,000 affordable housing units have been repaired in Windsor. 307 House holds in Windsor received down payment assistance, and thousands of evictions have been prevented. In addition, Mr. Speaker, through our programs we're assisting with the refurbishment of our social housing stock, thanks to their funds -- fund from the cap-and-trade program, which will be in jeopardy if another party comes into power. Mr. Speaker, we are active on this file. We are creating more housing and creating more affordable House for it is Ontarians.

>> MPP Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the acting Premier. What this Liberal government has done has -- is increased the wait list for social housing by 36%. 185,000 families at risk of homelessness. In the late '90s the Conservative government downloaded social housing onto municipalities without providing a way to pay for it. The Liberal government clearly liked the Conservative policies because they have refused to reverse that ill-conceived decision. Then in 2013 this Liberal government went even further. They cut provincial funding for municipal housing, social housing by \$150 million a year. And now about a third of all social housing in Ontario is at risk of being lost forever due to the expiry of contracts, which will allow private landlords to convert social housing into condos. What would this Liberal government do -- Social housing units and will they commit to building enough new units to meet the needs of Ontario families?

>> Minister Milczyn: Mr. Speaker, our government this year announced investment of \$667 million to repair our existing social housing stock. We announced \$200 million in investments for affordable housing to ensure our most vulnerable population, the homeless, victims of domestic violence, victims of human trafficking, get homes we can build with appropriate supports. Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is correct in noting as the auditor general does on page 730, that between 1996 and 2002, there was no affordable housing built in this province. That was by the Ontario P.C. Party,

the Ontario party of cuts. Because their platform once again is silent on the issue of housing -- \$6 billion of cuts will come out of the housing budget. We are increasing --

MPP Fraser to Minister Damerla Re: Age Friendly Community Grant Program

>> MPP John Fraser: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of seniors' affairs. Minister, I read yesterday that you were at the activity haven centre in Peterborough to announce the Ontario age friendly community recognition award. Speaker, in 2015 Ontario launched the age friendly community grant program providing \$1.5 million in funding to 56 projects, which help local governments and organizations transform their communities and become more physically and socially inclusive for seniors. So, Speaker, I know this program has already been fitted seniors in my riding of Ottawa South through places like council on aging and the Huron seniors centre and I know it's continuing to impact more and more ridings across the province. Will the Minister of seniors affairs inform the House about Ontario age friendly community recognition award, please?

>> Minister Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Speaker. And I want to thank the member from Ottawa South for that question and also his advocacy for seniors. Indeed he is right, Mr. Speaker. I was in Peterborough yesterday with the member for Peterborough. And I was there to make an important announcement. Just to give some background, Mr. Speaker, earlier this year in the summer my ministry had announced the age friendly communities recognition award program, the Ontario age friendly awards program. What this program does is it's going to recognize communities, municipalities, towns across Ontario that make an effort to make their communities age friendly. What I announced yesterday, Mr. Speaker, is that nominations are now open. Communities and municipalities can apply on line. So I'm going to urge all of my Colleagues here. Make sure municipalities apply. Thank you.

>> MPP Fraser: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the Minister for her answer. It's important that we recognize the work that's being done for Ontario seniors by countless communities and organizations across the province. This new program will encourage collaboration among communities, grassroots action to meet the needs of Ontario's growing seniors population. I'm also aware that this government will be expanding the successful age friendly community grant program. Could the Minister of seniors affairs please explain to this House about the expansion of the age friendly community grant program?

>> Minister Damerla: Thank you, Speaker, and the member from Ottawa South is absolutely right. Mr. Speaker, as some of you may remember, earlier in November I joined the Premier in announcing Ontario's action plan for seniors, an action plan that we are calling aging with confidence. It's a 20-point program, Mr. Speaker. And one of the centrepieces of that is we are going to be increasing our investments in age friendly communities. In fact we will be investing \$7 million more in providing municipalities and community organizations with the funding so that they can go ahead and implement to make their communities more age friendly. This bill, Mr. Speaker, on the fact that in the past we have funded 56 communities across Ontario with the age friendly planning grant. The communities went ahead. They did their planning. This money will help them implement that plan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Yurek to Minister Hoskins Re: Auditor General Report

>> MPP Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Speaker, yesterday's annual report released by that of your general -- general focused primarily on the government's health sector. Her report includes chapters on lab fees, cancer patients not having access to the drugs and services they need and rampant government waste. What's worse, this government was warned about these issues years in advance. Take for instance the 2009 warning to

expand stem cell transplant projects. This government ignored these warnings, resulting in millions of dollars in unneeded lives lost. Account Minister explain to the House why they chose to ignore these warnings?

>> Minister Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. In fact we've increased our stem cell funding in this province by 600% over the past five years. In fact earlier this year announced an additional \$31 million to expand capacity here at university health network at sunnybrook, Hamilton health sciences but, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important for us to imagine for a moment what an A.G. Report would look like under a P.C. Government, with the \$12 billion of cuts. And I want to talk about the fact that their so-called historic investment in mental health. We all agree how vitally important that is. But their proposed investment is a mere one-fifth of the investment that we've made over the previous ten years. Mr. Speaker, if you look at it -- so they're describing it as the largest mental health commitment in Canadian provincial history. It is anything but. Look at our record over the last ten years compared to what they're proposing and they're proposing one-fifth what we have ourselves invested.

>> MPP Yurek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wasteful incompetence and mismanagement and the government delivers Liberal spin and mistruths. Speaker -- I withdraw. To the Minister. Speaker, 65 patients have travelled to the US For stem cell transplants, and it's estimated another 106 will seek treatment over the border before Ontario brings up their standards. Had the government listened to the capacity warnings in 2009, they could have saved the taxpayer over \$90 million. Unfortunately it took a few high-profile cases of people dying waiting for treatment before this government deemed it a priority. Speaker, will the Minister apologize to the Ontarians who have had to seek life-saving treatments outside of the province. Because of this government's --

>> Minister Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I will never apologize for funding and providing lifesaving treatment, whether that treatment is required in Ontario or whether it's required in another part of this world, Mr. Speaker. We've increased the funding. We're increasing our capacity. Wait lists are going down. More and more Ontarians are having that transplant, that stem cell treatment here in the province. But, Mr. Speaker, I have to go back to the fact if we just compare the first year of the proposed Conservative spending on mental health with our record of our first year of that 10-year period. In fact they're proposing to invest \$151 million in their first year. Our first year we invested 600 million new dollars. Their second year, they're proposing 190 million. We invested \$650 million. Third year, 215 million. 800 million. Mr. Speaker, over their first four years they would invest 814 million new dollars. We invested in our first four years more than \$3 billion.

MPP Fife to Minister Sandals Re: Auditor General Report

>> MPP Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the acting Premier. Liberal government advertising has hit a 10-year high and I'm sure it's coincidental how its advertising has peaked in an election year. Ontario's auditor has reported that 30% of those ads are what she would call partisan ads but because of the legislative changes made by the Liberal government, the auditor general now has no choice but to approve those partisan ads. That means public dollars are being used to promote this Liberal government and this Liberal party. This is just one of the reasons, Mr. Speaker, why the people of this province no longer trust this government. Will the government stop running partisan ads today?

>> Minister Liz Sandals: Yes. Thank you very much. As I noted earlier, Speaker, Ontario does remain the only province in Canada that actually has rules around government advertising. So that in fact when we look at government advertising, we have a definition of partisan advertising which says that you can't side -- advertise a party. You can't have political figures from Cabinet, that in fact there are very tight rules about what is and is not allowed. But people keep referring back to we should go back to the old legislation. And quite frankly the things people are concerned about actually would have been perfectly acceptable under the old legislation. Let me remind you what the old legislation said. It said that you -- it was ok to inform people about government programs,

policies and services.

>> MPP Fife: Again to the acting Premier. I do not understand, nor do people of this province, understand how you can justify defending this program. It is indefensible. Public advertising should serve the public good, not help a desperate government hold onto seats. It wasn't just that the Premier was using public dollars to promote their hydro scheme or add to programs that didn't actually exist, but they actually used public dollars to try and target opposition MPPs. Ontarians have every reason to feel let down by this Premier and by this government. Will the acting Premier stop these advertising campaigns today or is she going to keep using public dollars for partisan Liberal ads?

>> Minister Sandals: As I say, by the old standards, which they claim are the correct standards, it would inform people about government programs, policies and services. That's exactly what the fair hydro ads did or you could -- it was ok if you were talking about changing social behaviour in the public interest. Who would you help? Exactly that. Climate change. Informing people about the reality of climate change. Exactly about talking to people about social policy. These ads are exactly on target under the old rules and the new rules. And you know what, Speaker? I've heard lots of complaints from members opposite about how we don't spend enough money advertising in small-town media. We do advertise in small town media. What do they do? They complain.

MPP Wong to Minister Laura Albanese Re: Canada Ontario Immigration Agreement

>> MPP Soo Wong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Minister of citizenship and immigration. Speaker, diversity has always been one of Ontario's greatest assets and in my riding of Scarborough- Agincourt. This diversity makes a stronger and more successful province. I'm pleased to learn that last year our province welcomed over 110,000 newcomers, including the many thousands of Syrian refugees living in my riding of Scarborough- Agincourt. We need to ensure all our newcomers are successful in this province. -- Province. It is vitally important we work with our federal partners to ensure our immigration system is working effectively to keep this province prosperous. It is my understanding the province has developed formal agreements with our federal partners since the last agreement expired in 2011. Speaker, through you to this Minister, can she please inform the House -- How her ministry's working with the federal government to ensure our shared goals of harnessing contributions.

>> Minister Laura Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for Scarborough- Agincourt for her question and her continuous interest towards immigrant communities. Ontario's relationship with the federal government continues to grow and improve. On November 24, I welcomed here at the legislature federal Minister of immigration, refugees and citizenship Honourable Ahmed Hussen to officially sign the -- Canada Ontario immigration agreement. The agreement sets a new path of co-operation between our province and the federal government, which will allow us to effectively lead and manage immigration policy and to welcome newcomers. The agreement includes commitments to bilateral collaboration on collection policy as well as increasing and improving economic immigration. Coia will help Canada and Ontario fulfil our shared goals of maximizing the contributions immigrants make to the economic, social and cultural life of our country.

>> MPP Wong: Thank you to the Minister. It is encouraging to hear that we are -- collaboration with our federal partners. Speaker, statistics Canada projections shows that immigration will continue to be the key driver of population growth in our country in the coming decades and I'm sure the Minister would agree with me immigration is especially crucial to Ontario's future to mitigate the impact of Ontario's aging population. In my riding alone 21% of my constituents are seniors. To address the labour shortages and to continue to draw the benefits of diversity. Mr. Speaker, the immigration is -- stable to balance the needs of the labour market and to keep our economy moving in the right direction. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can she please inform the House the steps taken. Of immigration in the province and ensure fairness and opportunity for all?

>> Minister Albanese: Thank you. Once again I would like to thank the member for her question. Mr. Speaker, our ministry has been working closely with the federal government, and in the months ahead, additional annexes to Coia will be signed to formalize federal and provincial coordination and French speaking immigrants, international students and the role of municipal government as partners in immigration -- immigration. Coila will also help Canada and -- Canada and Ontario share information and data more effectively, to inform policy, as well as program planning and evaluation. Also announced signing was a commitment from the federal government to provide \$21 million over the next three years to Ontario's bridge training program to go along with approximately 70 million from the province. This investment will help reduce the Barriers that skilled immigrants -- Face when seeking employment in this field. By working together, we help Ontario's communities become more inclusive and stronger, Mr. Speaker .

MPP Harris to Minister Del Duca Re: Drug Impaired Driving

>> MPP Michael Harris: Thank you, Speaker. We all agree those impaired whether from alcohol or drugs should not be driving. Sorry, Minister of transportation. Though shouldn't be driving period. And so we wonder why in bill 174 the Liberal government's time allocator response to cannabis legislation fails to ensure approved drug screening testing for all drivers. Speaker regular "G" driver suspected of alcohol impairment would take a breathalyzer. But if they're suspected of drug impairmentd they're not compelled to take a swab saliva test. Will the Minister tell us why his government is failing to ensure proper testing for all drivers with cannabis legislation around the corner?

>> Minister Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. I thank the member for his question. I've said this many times in this legislature and elsewhere. The safety of the travelling public is the ministry of transportation's number one priority. It's why we've introduced and passed legislation on a number of important initiatives relating to road safety over the last three, three and a half years, Speaker. A number of monthsing a the Premier, myself and other members of the government side did announce that we are moving forward with proposals that are embedded in legislation that's currently under consideration in the legislature that would help Ontario's travelling public transition safely to the new reality that will exist here in this province and right across this country post July 1st2018 when cannabis is in fact legalized, Speaker. As the member knows in that legislation there are measures that will help particular sets of drivers -- all drivers but novice drivers, commercial drivers, young drivers. There's a zero tolerance standard. Speaker, the question about the technology that needs to be available to help us get right over that final hurdle is something that the federal government is focused on. I'll follow up in the supplementary question.

>> MPP Harris: Actually not all drivers in factment other jurisdictions understands the importance of approved fluid screening for drug impairment. New Brunswick ensures all drivers to take the screening, but Ontario limits the testing for young, novice and commercial drivers only. While the rest of the driving population is subject to just the roadside sobriety test. As committee members meet today to consider what little input the Liberal government has allowed on their omni cannabis bill, we will be putting forward an amendment to mandate oral screening for all suspected drug-impaired drivers. MADD Canada has written in support and I'll read their quote -- the current restriction on using the oral fluid screening devices for only novice and commercial drivers is a major policy flaw and will really restrict police officers' ability to apprehend drug-impaired drivers. MADD Canada gets it. New Brunswick gets it. Will the Minister join us later today and support our amendment to keep our roads safe here in Ontario?

>> Minister Del Duca: Speaker, I think the only person in this exchange who doesn't get it is the member who's asking the question. There is nothing in our legislation or in the highway traffic act that prevents law enforcement from pulling any particular driver regardless of what the impairment might be, alcohol, drugs or anything else, distraction, Speaker. There's nothing in the highway traffic act that prevents law enforcement from taking that driver off the road, Speaker. There are a number

of measures already contained in the act, some of which were passed in bill 31 in this House a novel months ago, Speaker. In the case of novice, commercial and young drivers, Speaker, it's a zero tolerance standard that's being applied but that does not mean that nonnovice, noncommercial and nonyoung drivers can in fact drive impaired, Speaker. We're working with the federal government on what the appropriate level of impairment will be and what the ultimate technology will be used at the roadside. Having said that I do look forward to having a conversation with the member. And this legislation will continue to navigate through the legislature as it certainly should. Thanks very much, Speaker .