

REVISED: Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Tuesday, October 04, 2016

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Tuesday, October 04, 2016

Unedited Transcript
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MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Sandals) Re: Public Accounts

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. According to the auditor general, this is the first time in the history of Ontario that the financial statements have been released without the auditor general's opinion. And I'm -- an unprecedented action in Ontario's history and incredibly disrespectful to the auditor general and the people of Ontario. But why, why would the release without the a.g.'s opinion? That's the big question. Was it because she discovered the government has an \$11 billion hole in their budget? Mr. Speaker, that includes \$1.5 billion deficit this year. That's a lot of money. How will the government fill this hole? Is it going to be through new taxes? Higher hydro rates? New fees or will the Liberals just cut services?

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by saying jays go -- blue days -- go, Jays, go. Blue Jays. Mr. Speaker, we were very clear yesterday that we have accepted, we have accepted the auditor general's numbers for this year. We released the documents despite the divergence in accounting opinions specific to two pension funds between treasury board officials and the auditor as part of our commitment to openness and transparency, because it was past the date, Mr. Speaker, when that information was to be in the public. In the meantime, we will be consulting with experts on how our pension assets should be accounted for moving forward. Officials will be engaging. Expert accounting community to support a full understanding of how that --

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. Every time it looks like the Liberals are hiding something, it becomes just a matter of time until they get caught. First they tried to hide the cost of the gas plant scandal. We later found out that it cost over \$1 billion. Then the financial accountability officer caught the Liberals when they were supposed to use the funds from the fire sale of Hydro One for transportation, and then it goes to the deficit. And now the auditor general caught them trying to hide an \$11 billion hole in the budget. Mr. Speaker, I know our grade 6 students are failing in math but I at least thought the government knew how to count. I expected better from this government. So my question is directly to the Premier, why has the auditor general given your government a failing grade on public accounts? Directly to the Premier.

>> Minister Sandals: Yes. Thank you very much, and I'm very pleased to report that using the numbers that were suggested by the auditor general, what we really showed yesterday was that in fact we have beat our deficit target, Speaker, for the seventh year. I consider that very important because it shows what is happening with the province's books and with the province's fiscal performance is in fact we are managing our economy prudently and we are on target to reach our goal of balancing the budget in '17/18. We in fact showed that we had a projection originally of an 8.5 billion deficit. We now have a 5 billion deficit last year. We beat our projection, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. Sometimes I wonder what fantasy world this government is living in. When it comes to believing this government or the auditor general, I'm with the auditor general. This is the auditor general saying that there is an \$11 billion hole in the budget and there is now an additional \$1.5 billion away from balancing the budget. Why this government continues to ignore and disrespect the auditor general is beyond me. On the flipside you have the government saying that everything is fine, that their numbers add up. The auditor general is saying fairly clearly that --So, Mr. Speaker, instead of ignoring the auditor general, how is this government going to make up the \$1.5 billion in their current budget? And additionally, Mr. Speaker, how does this government reconcile the fact that they're the first government in Ontario's history to release public accounts without the auditor general's opinion? It's beyond me.

>> Minister Sandals: Thank you. I'll go over this one more time calmly. When we tabled our budget in 2015, we projected that the '15 --16 year would result in a deficit of 8.5 billion. When we tabled our budget, the current-year budget last spring, 2016, we said the interim projection for a deficit would be 5.5 billion, and what did we actually achieve using the auditor general's numbers? We achieved a deficit of 5 billion. In other words, we beat the budget targets using the auditor general's numbers by \$3.5 billion. The member from Kitchener-conestoga, come to order. You do have a wrap-up sentence if you want. Yes, thank you. So, to me, it is good news that "A" we got the financial information. Out to the public and "B" that we've beaten our deficit target.

MPP Brown to Premier Wynne (Naidoo-Harris) Re: Education and childcare funding

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Yesterday I saw firsthand how great the faculty, the facilities and the students are at yes I can nursery. I understand why the Premier fought passionately for funding this wonderful nursery nine years ago. And because of that I can't understand why this Liberal government has turned their backs on yes I can. The government has made a decision to cancel its annual funding. It has asked yes I can nursery for a wind-down plan from the school. Without provincial support yes I can may have to close its doors and Ontario would lose 130 precious child care spaces. Mr. Speaker, why is this Liberal government turning their back on yes I can? Do they not appreciate this is their responsibility in do not pass the buck. Do not say it's some other level government. It has always been funded by the province of Ontario for nine years. It has been in existence for 26 years. Do not abandon them.

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, far from walking away from this school, which does provide great service to kids, Mr. Speaker, and have been a champion of the program in north Toronto. It's a great program, Mr. Speaker, and in fact yes I can nursery school received \$300,000 a year, provincial dollars that flow to the city and flow to the nursery school, Mr. Speaker. That money continues to flow. The reality is, Mr. Speaker, that for some time we have been, officials in the ministry of education and children and youth services, have been trying to get the nursery school to sit down. The Speaker: Member from Dufferin-caledon come to order. And to work to come one a budget and a sustainability plan, Mr. Speaker. Our provincial officials are perfectly willing to continue to sit with the nursery school. But, Mr. Speaker, there does have to be. An open budgeting process. There has to be a conversation with the city officials. We're willing to be part of that but it has to happen, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The Premier continues to stress that yes I can continue to operate. There's some flow-through funding. That is not correct. According to the local Toronto city councillor in the area who said yesterday at the press conference, they said there is no city mechanism for this autism funding. There is no flow-through funding that can be used. Your local Toronto city councillor is saying you're wrong. This nursery is saying the Premier is wrong. There is only one level of government that is pulling funding, pulling \$150,000 to take care of these children. It's not right. It's wrong. You fought for these children nine years ago. Why are you abandoning them today? Why?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the way funding for child care and these programs works is that the money from the province flows to the municipalities and the municipalities allocate those -- Part of it is wage subsidy. Part of it is for other programs, Mr. Speaker. But that money flows through to the municipality. That's why it's imperative that yes I can sit down with city officials and, as I say, provincial officials who have been part of the conversation are perfectly willing to sit down with them to come up with a sustainability plan. But, Mr. Speaker, there has to be an open budgeting process. There has to be a sun -- sustainability plan and that has to be done in conjunction with the city officials. Premier Wynne: I know Jay Robinson, who is the city councillor, would be perfectly -- would understand that that's the process that needs to happen.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, in the Premier's response opening budget process or speaking line, they're taking \$150,000 away. That's why it's closing. You've got the local city councillor saying there is no Toronto mechanism. You have a Liberal senator come down from Ottawa who's passionate, Jim Munson on autism funding saying this is the wrong thing for the government to do. I think she'll understand why this government continues to go after these families. First they took families with children with autism to the courts. Then they tried to cancel the I.B.I. Funding and now you have 130 kids, many of them, most of them children with autism, and this par is abandoning them. No government is walking away. There's no municipal mechanism. There's no federal mechanism. The funding is provincial. Brown: You're abandoning them. Stop this attack on children with autism.

>> Minister Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I am pleased to rise today as associate Minister of education to address this. First of all I want to make it clear that our government is committed to ensuring that every child has access to the supports that they need. This is so important when it come to our children during their early years. Our government is committed to giving our kids the best start in life. That's why we are the making historic investments. We're creating another 100,000 licensed child care spaces for 0 to 4-year-olds over the next five years. It's an historic investment. We have more than doubled the child care funding to municipalities to over \$1 billion a year. That is why we are also providing funding to the city of Toronto, who then fund a number of local child care programs, including. I care nursery school at \$300,000 a year. Mr. Speaker, we are committed to ensuring that a good program like this gets the support that it needs.

N.B.: Transcripts are captured by a closed captioning system and may contain errors.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro One and electricity bills

>> Andrea Horwath: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question's to the Premier. Yesterday I asked the Premier about people I met across Ontario who are struggling to pay their hydro bills. They have student loans that they can barely afford. They're paying for child care and it's only getting more and more expensive in this province. They're having to stop saving for their kids' education because their bills are simply too high, Speaker. The Premier said she has an enormous amount of sympathy. People don't need sympathy, Speaker. They need action. Will this Premier stop the privatization of Hydro One at all local utility companies?

>> Premier Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the reason that I talked about the sympathy is because we have taken action and we are taking action to deal with the problems that people are facing in their lives every single day. The leader of the third party began by talking about tuition. Well, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly why we believe tuition should be free for students from low-income families, Mr. Speaker. The leader of the third party talked about child care. That's exactly why, Mr. Speaker, we think there needs to be more child care particularly for the 0 to 4 years which is why 100,000 new spaces over five years is critical, Mr. Speaker. And the fact that we are moving to take the provincial portion of the H.S.T. off electricity bills, to further reduce bills for people in rural communities, Mr. Speaker, and to work with small businesses so that they will have access to conservation initiatives so they can save money. All of that comes out of that, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, whether this Premier chooses to admit it or not, life is becoming more and more unaffordable for the people of this province, all across Ontario. People are already struggling to pay for child care, pay off student loans that they've been paying for a decade, and on top of that the hydro bill keeps climbing and climbing and climbing. People don't know what to do, Speaker. They didn't vote to turn Hydro One or their local utility into private for-profit companies and they cannot afford for that to happen. Will this Premier stop the sell-off of our hydro system in the province of Ontario?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, underlying this question, as has been the case for many months now, is an ideological position that argues that we should not build new transit. We should not make investments in new infrastructure by leveraging assets that have been owned by the people of the province for many years. Mr. Speaker -- Premier Wynne: That we shouldn't make those investments, that we shouldn't invest in new assets for the people of Ontario that are needed in 2016, Mr. Speaker. So we categorically reject that notion. We believe that investing in roads and -- and bridges and transit across the province is necessary. We're demonstrating, Mr. Speaker, that those investments are creating economic growth, and we are going to continue to foster economic growth across the province.

>> Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, even the financial accountability officer says the Premier's got it wrong. You don't sell off a revenue-generating asset to pay for infrastructure. It's the wrong thing to do, Speaker. And that's not -- at all. That's just a fact. What I really think the Premier needs to know is that all the families in Ontario that I've been talking to are telling us that they cannot afford their hydro bills. They're alone, Speaker. The people I met in Kitchener and in Hamilton, in Niagara Falls, they're not alone. It's happening everywhere. They're seeing their bills go up and their pay cheques are staying the same. They can't afford private power generation. They can't afford private power transmission. They can't afford private local utilities, Speaker. The Premier is not an innocent bystander in this mess. She can take action, and she needs to take action. Will she stop the sell-off of our electricity system in the province of Ontario?

>> Premier Wynne: So, Mr. Speaker, as the leader of the third party continues to try to inflate these issues I talked about the need for us to try to make investments in infrastructure and that's the asset discussion. If she wants to have the conversation about the electricity price increases, Mr. Speaker, we are very aware that the investments that have been made in order to upgrade the system, in order to have a 90% clean emissions-free grid in this province by shutting down the coal-fired plants, by jump starting a renewable industry, Mr. Speaker, that there's costs associated with that and investments that we've made. So, Mr. Speaker, we have put in place programs to address those challenges. So we've removed the debt retirement charge, Mr. Speaker, from people's bills. We've put in place the Ontario energy and property tax credit low income energy assistance program, Mr. Speaker. Northern Ontario energy credit. Most recently we've announced we're going to be removing another 8% the provincial portion of H.S.T. from people's bills. We understand we need to take action and we are.

MPP Horwath to Premier Wynne Re: Hydro One sale

>> Andrea Horwath: My question's also for the Premier. If I was looking across the aisle at a Conservative Premier and they said to me that they wanted to sell off Toronto hydro and every other local utility, I'd be disappointed, Speaker, but I wouldn't be surprised. People expect Conservatives to privatize. It's in their D.N.A. That's what they do. But that's not what the Liberal party ran on, speaker. People were deeply let down when this Premier announced out of the blue. She's actually going to sell off Hydro One. Now everybody's worried that she's actually planning to help privatize their local utilities. Will this Premier rule out any further sell-offs?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, you know, I believe that government exists to make decisions in the best interests of the people that it serves. I believe that if the government looks at a province and sees infrastructure that has not been invested in, Mr. Speaker, that has been neglected by subsequent governments, Mr. Speaker, that has not paid attention to the economic growth of municipalities and has not made the investments necessary, then it is up to that government to make those investments and to find a practical way to do that. That is what we have done, Mr. Speaker. We have seen a problem. We have addressed that problem and what we're seeing now, Mr. Speaker, is Ontario is one of the leaders in the country in economic growth. That's government's responsibility, Mr. Speaker.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, people work really hard to save energy but at the end of the day people need to turn on the power to cool their homes, to cook their meals, to do their laundry, you name it, Speaker. People need electricity. So when they see the Premier selling off Hydro One and encouraging the sell-off of local utilities like Toronto hydro, think see -- they see a government helping people at the top while they make a hell of a lot of money while -- Withdraw, Speaker. They see the government helping people at the top, helping people at the top making a heck of a lot of money, Speaker, while everyone else has to pay the price. People cannot afford it. Will this Premier stopper plan to sell off the hydro utilities in this province as well as stopping the sell-off of Hydro One?

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The other responsibility this government has is to make sure that, as decisions are made there are people who need support, that we put those supports in place, Mr. Speaker. To help people to deal with their expenses on a day-to-day basis. So, Mr. Speaker, we have as I have said a number of times we have put a number of programs in place, including most recently announcing that we're taking the provincial portion of the H.S.T. Off people's bills. But, Mr. Speaker, our responsibility is broader than that. We have to look at other ways that people need support and other ways that they can participate in the economy. So for example, Mr. Speaker, making sure that every student in this province has access to postsecondary education no matter what their income, Mr. Speaker. That is the responsibility of government. That's why tuition will be free starting in September 2017 for 150,000 students from low-income families, Mr. Speaker. Those are the kind of decisions that taken in a tactful mean that we are paying attention to people's needs every day.

>> Andrea Horwath: I find it astounding that not once did this Premier say it's the government's responsibility to listen to the wishes of 80% of people in this province -- Their public asset sold off. The Premier wants people to believe that she has nothing to do with the privatization of Toronto hydro, but she's already giving them and as finance Minister mentioned it yesterday, \$100 million in tax giveaways to facilitate that and she's planning more tax giveaways, Speaker, in the hopes that privatizing Toronto hydro, hoping that in fact that move will take the attention away from her own sell-off of Hydro One. The problem is that there are people across Ontario who can't afford to pay any more, Speaker, and instead of making things better for them, the Premier's trying to help herself and her party yet again. Will this Premier admit that she's got no mandate to privatize Hydro One or a single local utility And stop all the privatization now?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know it makes me smile when the leader of the third party talks about helping us and our friends when she references the decision around Hydro One. It was a hard decision, Mr. Speaker. It was a very difficult decision because it was a practical decision based on a need that we saw and we looked to fulfil our commitment to invest in infrastructure in this province of the it was not an easy decision. It's one of those decisions that government has to take in order to be able to move forward. So, Mr. Speaker, we took that decision because we know that the neglect that infrastructure in this province has suffered over years, Mr. Speaker, the lack of investment, the digging of holes and the filling in of those holes and a lack of maintenance across the north, Mr. Speaker, that had to stop. We had to find the resources to make the -- Made that decision, Mr. Speaker, and the leader of the third party wants to conflate the issue of that decision and electricity prices. It's just not the case, Mr. Speaker.

MPP MacLeod/Fideli to Minister Sandals Re: public accounts

>> Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier, Speaker. Halloween came early it appears yesterday when the government was so spooked by my question about the public accounts that they treated us to a

hastily held technical briefing, a press conference and unaudited financial statements. This is unprecedented. It's never happened in Ontario before. It showed an \$11 billion hole in their budget, and they tried to hide it by admonishing and undermining the auditor general. Despite the auditor's warning this past June of accounting changes in her -- and then again in the 2015 auditor's report in chapter 2 which I'll have one of the pages deliver. The government has been aware of this, Speaker, for quite some time. And they want to know, as Ontarians, how this government is going to pay for it. Are they going to cut services to kids with autism? Are they going to be even higher hydro bills, new taxes, or are they going to trick us with all of the above?

>> Minister Sandals: Yes, thank you. I think, Speaker, we should maybe go back to the beginning of the story, which is that while there certainly has been an ongoing discussion between the public servants who do the accounts and the auditor general, not I would say the politicians for the record. While there's been an ongoing discussion, the first notification we got that the auditor general would not treat -- was rejecting the pension treatment which had currently been used for the last 14 years. Thank you very much. For the past 14 years, since 2001/2 year, the auditors of Ontario have approved a particular accounting practice -- We were faced with the situation -- That the auditor presented us on September the 13th with written information that she was rejecting the treatment. Used for the.

>> Victor Fideli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Yesterday the auditor general confirmed there's an \$11 billion hole in the government's budget. Rather than co-operate with the auditor general, the government went into full panic mode with a desperate news conference. Rather than address the financial waste and mismanagement, the government continued to break their legal obligation. They stonewalled the province's independent officers. Speaker, there's a pattern here, and now they have released unaudited financial statements. No verification from the auditor general. Speaker, people in Ontario want to know what this government is hiding and how it affects them. I asked the Premier, if the auditor general refuses to verify their numbers, how can we ever trust anything they tell us?

>> Minister Sandals: Yes. We had advice from our public servants, who we certainly hold in high regard, that the books should be treated one way. We had advice from the auditor general that the books should be treated another way. The way Cabinet resolved it was to actually pass a regulation that the auditor general's treatment would be used in 2015. So I would point out that using the treatments that the auditor general asked us to use, that in fact what we have is a \$5 billion deficit, which is \$3.5 billion lower than what we originally projected in the budget, Speaker. We do not have some sort of panic as the person over there seems to think. What we have is the desire to get this information to the public so the public can figure out what is going on..

MPP Taylor to Premier Wynne (Flynn) Re: Peel CAS workers

>> Monique Taylor: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, the Premier promised to be better, that she would ensure vulnerable children are a priority but that is sim -- has simply not been the case. Since September 18th, Cupe workers in local 4914 representing child protection, administrative and support staff at Peel C.A.S. Have been on strike. Replacement workers are being paid outrageous amounts. No wonder there's distrust in the system. Will the Premier step up and ensure that Peel C.A.S. Workers can get back to doing the important work they do for vulnerable children?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister of labour is going to want to comment in the supplementary, but let me just say that I believe that negotiations have to be between the parties who are involved, Mr. Speaker, that the best deals are found at the table, Mr. Speaker, so I hope that both sides will come together and will find a way through the negotiations. That's the way the Collective bargaining process works best, Mr. Speaker.

>> Taylor: The buck stops with the Premier, Speaker. Workers should be protecting children instead of being forced to walk picket lines. Children need stability. The children's aid system definitely needs stability. Vulnerable children should be the priority of this government, making sure that people who work with them are respected is a key part of that. When will the government stop making -- when will they start making this about children in care and making sure that the people who provide the services are respected?

>> Minister Flynn: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, as a former president of a children's aid society in this province I well understand what the Speaker's talking about when she asks about these types of issues. But we should be proud as a labour relations record we have of the province of Ontario. Collective agreements are reached in well over 90% of the disputes that take place. Collective agreements are reached without a resort to strike action, Speaker. When we reach an impasse, Speaker -- Thank you, Speaker. When we reach an impasse like we have in this regard, Speaker, we have some of the best

arbitrators. We've got some of the best mediators, the best conciliators, Speaker, in the country that make themselves available to ensure that the parties are able to come to an agreement at the table, Speaker. The best agreements are reached at the -- Bargaining table. I would urge the parties to get back to the table and strike a deal.

MPP Miczin to Minister Matthews Re: Supporting students and grants

>> MPP Peter Milczin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of advanced education and skills development. This spring our government made the exciting announcement they were going to be making osap more generous for all students and actually making tuition free for low-income students. Mr. Speaker, account Minister please give this House an update on what this government is doing to make free tuition a reality?

>> Minister Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you for the question from the member from Etobicoke-lakeshore. When qualified students are prevented from attending postsecondary'd indication because of costs, we all lose. We are all better off when all of us get the education that they can, Speaker. So that's why we're working hard to implement the most ambitious reform of student assistance in North America. I'm very proud -- for families under \$50,000, but we're also supporting families of Progressive, Speaker, so up to \$160,000 family incomes. Those students will still receive aid if proved up-front grants, Speaker. 150,000 students in Ontario will be getting grants that are higher than their tuition, getting free tuition. We say to students you do the work. You get the marks, you get accepted. We'll make sure that money does not stand in the way of higher education.

>> Milczin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for her answer. Generous financial assistance is so important to ensuring that underrepresented students are able to reach their full potential. However, we know that some low-income students never even apply for postsecondary education let alone osap because they assume the cost is too high. The sticker price of going to school can present a very real hurdle for low-income students who they have a hard time understanding what financial assistance they may be eligible for. Through you, Mr. Speaker. Account Minister tell us what our government is doing to tell students about these changes?

>> Minister Matthews: The member from Etobicoke lake shower is absolutely right. Yes, financial Barriers can keep students from pursuing higher education. But the perception of high costs and the fear of taking on debt can be a roadblock in and of itself. That's why we're working hard to spread the word about osap reform. We're going to College and university fairs. We're talking to guidance counsellors. We're going around the province to make sure that young people understand what doors our new osap can open for them. Recently I had the opportunity to tour the Ontario university fair at the metro convention centre. 130,000 people attended that weekend, Speaker. I visited the osap booth. I spoke to students. I spoke to parents. Staff manning that booth said it was the busiest they've ever been. People are excited about this. But I'm also asking MPP S from all sides of the House to make sure. Students in their ridings know that the doors of opportunity are open in Ontario.

MPP Yurek to Minister McGarry Re: hunting and fishing money collected

>> Jeff Yurek: Mr. Speaker, my question's to the Minister of natural resources and forestry. Speaker, after five years, four Minister s, many F.O.I.S and conversations with the Ombudsman, I finally received some information regarding special purpose accounts. As you know, Speaker, the money Collected from hunters and anglers' licences, Royalties and fines is to be used solely to improve hunting and fishing in Ontario. However I was shocked to see the money Collected from hunters and anglers was going to purchase House s and psychologists. Speaker, would the Minister be able to explain to hunters and anglers of this province how buying homes and paying for psychologists improves angling and hunting in Ontario?

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. I thank the member opposite for the question today. I wanted to take this opportunity to thank the conservation officers who provide enforcement for our hunters and anglers and programs throughout Ontario. Thank you very much. The member is talking about the special purpose account for our fish and wildlife programs. It costs about \$100 million annually, to pay for the fish and wildlife programs and services across Ontario. In 2015, the S.P.A., the special purpose account, gained \$70 million and that goes to provide fish and wildlife management activities across Ontario. Some of those pieces talk about monitoring fish and wildlife populations, fish culture and stocking. Conservation officers and enforcement, draws and licensing activities and hunter -- Support that

across --

>> Yrek: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Minister. Speaker, the lack of transparency and details continues with this new Minister. Speaker, each Minister I've dealt with, four of them over the past five years, have tried to hide the truth about expenditures and special purpose accounts. This summer the Elmer district stakeholders received response from the mnrf finding out details to special purpose expenses in our area. The response they received from the ministry was they do not track expenditures for the fish and wildlife special purpose accounts. However the financial administration act requires that receipts and disbursements be recorded for special account purposes. We know they have the information for hunters and anglers. Speaker, will the Minister now release the details outlining how moneys from the special purpose accounts were spent and an explanation of how these moneys have improved hunting and angling in Ontario?

[Applause]

>> Minister McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. Again I thank the member opposite for the supplementary question. Staff that is funded from the fish and wildlife special purpose account include but are not limited to biologists, scientists, conservation officers, fish culture staff, C.O. Staff and administration staff. Expenditures related to staff salaries and benefits are paid through the fish and wildlife S.P.A. For those staff performing fish and wildlife management activities across Ontario. Directives and guidelines in place that govern benefits and staff relocation entitlements when required. We have a process within the ministry to review each year program costs within the ministry and the fish and wildlife S.P.A.. It costs about, again, \$100 million. To pay for the fish and wildlife, but yet that member, when asked to pay for an increase in budget.

MPP Fife to Minister Sandals Re: Public Accounts

>> Fife: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, this government has received to give information to the financial accountability officers. They have attacked and they have undermined the auditor general for this province repeated lil over the years and now they have tabled the public accounts without the auditor general's opinion for the first time ever. There is a pattern here, Speaker. This government is making the kind of history that these people -- that leaves people deeply disappointed. Will the Premier admit that this was a mistake and work with the auditor to retable audited public accounts for the province of Ontario?

>> Minister Sandals I will be absolutely delighted to table the public accounts but I cannot do that until we have an audit opinion from the auditor. That is why yesterday we released the five consolidated financial statements in our annual report, which is the same financial information. It is because we are awaiting an opinion from the auditor, and I would point out that we in fact passed the deadline for the tabling of the public accounts last -- on the 27th, and I am not able to table the public accounts until we have an opinion from the auditor. So when we get the opinion, when we get the opinion from the auditor, I will indeed table the public accounts. Thank you.

>> Fife: Mr. Speaker, they have an opinion. They just don't like that opinion. Speaker, this Premier promise today have the most transparent and open government in Canada, but that's not what people are seeing. The government is trying to avoid accountability very clearly. By tabling financials without an audit the Liberal government is releasing numbers that suit them, not the people of this province. We believe that the government should be about serving the people, not the interests of the Liberal party. Will the Premier commit to retabling the public accounts with the agreement of Ontario's nonpartisan auditor general?

>> Minister Sandals: So just let me restate, I do not have a written opinion from the auditor general. What we have -- once we have a written opinion from the auditor general, I will be very happy to retable the accounts, and they will say what the consolidated financial statement said, which we released yesterday, which is that the province has beaten its deficit target for the seventh year in a row. We have projected an 8.5 billion-dollar deficit. In fact we achieved a \$5 billion deficit, and that that is -- We achieved a \$5 billion deficit which is 3.5 billion dollars better. Than what we had projected in last year's get.

MPP Martins to Minister MacCharles Re: Ontario's Accessibility Action Plan

>>Christina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question's for the Minister responsible for accessibility. Mr. Speaker, one in seven people in Ontario have a disability and this ratio's expected to increase to one in five over the next 20 years as our population ages. I speak regularly with constituents in my riding of Davenport about accessibility in Ontario. They come in all the time and tell me that while Ontario has made great progress, there is still a lot we can do to remove Barriers and increase accessibility for people with disabilities. Through the accessibility for Ontarians, the disabilities act and Ontario's action plan, the government has made a commitment to make Ontario accessible by 2025. Mr. Speaker, account Minister share with the House some of the great work this government has done to move forward to make Ontario accessible by 2025?

>> Minister MacCharles: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Davenport for this great question. October as we know is disability employment awareness month, and I will make a statement for a -- full statement in the House this afternoon on that. I am happy to take this opportunity as Ontario's first Minister responsible for accessibility to share with the House what makes Ontario a leader in accessibility through our aoda and our action plan we are building on our strength and sharpening our focus to engage businesses and promote cultural shifts. We've launched a marketing campaign focused on raising awareness of the employment standards for employers, and later this year, Speaker, we'll be releasing our provincial employment strategy for people with disabilities. As well we completed the first ever review of the customer service standard and initiated the review of the transportation standard, which is currently under way, Speaker and I'm happy to share more in the supplementary.

>> Martins: Thank you for -- to the Minister for sharing this information with the House. It is great to hear that this government sees the value and importance of making Ontario accessible for all. I hear from my constituents all the time, from both business owners and customers, about opportunities they have missed because of the Barriers people with disabilities face. One of my constituents Sharon uses an electric scooter and visits my office regularly. She recently told me that when a business is accessible not only do customers with disabilities serve to gain but the business benefits as well. While we know that organizations will make the services accessible gain a competitive advantage, unfortunately many organizations are unaware of this great opportunity. Can the Minister explain how the government is engaging with businesses and business owners. To understand the value and importance of becoming accessible?

>> Minister MacCharles: Thank you. I thank the member again for the question. We know that for business being accessible, Speaker, is not I couldn't say the right thing to do but it's the smart thing to do. Reports have shown that the global market represents 1.3 billion people with disabilities and their 2.3 billion family members, friends, caregivers and Colleagues. That amounts to \$8 trillion, Speaker, much disposable income globally that some businesses are unfortunately missing out because of the lack of accessibility. Greater accessibility Ontario of course means greater opportunity for all, for raising awareness through campaigns, engaging in public education and providing support for businesses and of course regularly conducting compliance inspection audits. We're working to ensure that not only compliant with the law but to help businesses see the value in the importance of making our province fully accessible

MPP Walker to Premier Wynne (Duguid, Leal) Re: electricity raztes and farming

>> Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. We've been listening to the Minister of energy lauding your hydro replat plan for rural Ontario especially hit hard by increasing electricity bills. Energy rates are one of the most expensive input costs to our farmers, yet the Minister 's telling farmers off peak is the ideal time to use electricity. And I quote just farm during off peak hours and you'll save lots of money, a third of your bill. How can she explain time of use prices would be of any use to a farmer?

>>Minister Duguid: I'm delight today respond to the question because it's another example of the chameleon-like tendency of the new P.C. Party. One minute they're telling us, Mr. Speaker, that we should be trying to find ways to lower energy rates. We come in with a rebate program that provides 8% across the board for users -- Farmers and others and in rural parts of the province, Mr. Speaker, much more than that. And, Mr. Speaker, all we get from the member opposite is critique and criticism. Mr. Speaker, we've responded, concern to our farmers. I know our Minister of agriculture listens very closely the concerns that our farmers raise. Mr. Speaker, we've put in place the program that will provide significant discounts on energy costs for our farmers and for residents right across the province.

>> Walker: Thank you, Speaker. I'm going to go back to the Premier again. Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier's coming to realize that her Liberal protection plan for Ontario farmers is moot. A serious game changer for farmers. The Ontario federation of agriculture has told you that -- more than \$1 billion a year of new disposable income for rural Ontarians to invest in and build our rural economy. But maybe the

Premier and her Minister know better so I ask her how does she imagine getting Ontario's 360,000 dairy cows to give milk during off-peak hours?

>> Minister Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I -- Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the supplementary from the member this morning. In effect it's interesting enough. You know, I always read the commentary for the Ontario -- Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. And I read the -- from the Ontario federation of agriculture. We have the president in our gallery today. It's interesting when our Colleague the Minister of energy announced the program, there was a very positive commentary from the Ontario federation of agriculture. In fact by -- By reducing the threshold level of the I.C.I., there will be more farm businesses. In the province of Ontario that can take advantage of that program, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Vanthoff to Premier Wynne (Leal) Re: farming risk management program

>> John Vanthoff: Thank you, Speaker. Farmers are the foundation of our huge agricultural sector, 150,000 jobs depend on farmers. The risk management program was designed by farmers to ensure that against the boom-and-bust cycles in agriculture. The Liberal government capped the program the Liberal government capped the program in the boom, but since 2012 farmgate prices for corn, wheat, beef and pork have plummeted by half. Premier, will you lift the cap on the risk management program to help protect farmers from the oncoming bust? The Speaker: Thank you.

>> Minister Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the question for the member from Timiskaming- Cochrane. Of course who's been an agriculture leader in northeastern Ontario. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, it was the predecessor of mine, Carol Mitchell, that canvassed broadly to all commodity groups that are not covered by supply management in the province of Ontario. It was this government that brought in a risk management program. The only province in Canada, Mr. Speaker, that has such a program. We did so to help our farmers to alleviate the challenges that they have, prices that are determined by the Chicago exchange, to level the playing field to give that support. The \$100 million program is the place to do it and my recollection is, Mr. Speaker, we got no support from the opposition benches when that was in our budget.

>> Once again to the Premier. The fact of the matter is that program was designed by farmers and the government to be bankable and predictable, but then the government capped it so it's no longer bankable and predictable. The fact of the matter is thousands of jobs rely on the stability of the farm community, because as farmers get economically squeezed, they are -- processors can't rely on their products because they might not be there. The government expects farmers to be stewards of land with all their environmental rules, yet they don't come through with the programs that actually help farmers survive. Once again, will this government remove the caps to maintain the stability if the agriculture sector so we can retain the hundreds of thousands of jobs that sector creates?

>> Minister Leal: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his supplementary. The fact of the matter is we brought this program with Carol Mitchell, predecessor of mine, was here. Recently did so, Mr. Speaker, because farmers in Ontario that are not covered by supply management wanted stability in their industry. We want today get away from ad hoc programming. So this government of course had extensive consultation with the [unclear] Management group of late. We brought in a risk management program for Ontario farmers that's bankable and predictable to make sure we can address those concerns, like we've had this past summer, when parts of Ontario had unprecedented drought. I was in the field meeting with those farmers to make sure that they knew that our risk management program was the place, Mr. Speaker, to help them. -- Was in place, Mr. Speaker, to help them.

MPP Pettapiece to Minister Jaczek Re: adult children with developmental disabilities

>> Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of community and social services. It's about the families in crisis and many more on the brink. They don't have the services they need to care for their adult children with developmental disabilities. Some families have no funding at all. Many are left sitting on wait lists. The Ombudsman's report concluded that the government response to their plight was unreasonable and wrong. The Minister knows how important this is. Yet there was no mention of services for individuals with developmental disabilities in the throne speech. Why not, Speaker? And when will the government's response improve to something better than what the Ombudsman defines as unreasonable and wrong?

>> Minister Jaczek: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question because it gives me the opportunity to say how much I respect the individuals with developmental disabilities in this province, their families, their caregivers and the challenges that they in fact face. And certainly the

comments made by the Ombudsman I found to be entirely unacceptable and this is why we're working so hard to ensure that no individual is left in unacceptable circumstances, and this is why on this side of the House we're working so very hard. Many ministries are involved, to ensure that we have seamless service for these individuals. For my Colleague the Minister of children and youth, the Minister of education and I are particularly engaged in this file. And this of course is why we have shown to those with developmental disabilities. We are now spending some \$2.11 billion per year on this particular sector. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>>Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. I'm sure the Minister is sincere, but the government continues pushing families to the brink of crisis before they take notice. The hint family who I represent is one example. We appreciate the Minister's interest but this family has endured months of stress and uncertainty. The forty family also needs help. Lucas forty needs passport funding but he's been on the wait list for over a year. When Lucas turned 18 his funding stopped. Even though he is the same person with the same needs he was the day before. Now he has to use his odsp cheque for all of his needs. What will the Minister do for Lucas and his family, and why did this government still say happy 18th birthday by cutting off services to those with exceptional needs?

>> Minister Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And of course I cannot comment on individual cases in this House, but having said that I want to assure every member that if they become aware of urgent situations, I and my ministry officials are anxious to look into the situation and look at any possible avenue of support. And having said that I do want to reiterate that our government did in fact introduce a budget that included \$810 million for the sector over three years, a budget that was voted against in fact by the opposition members, and these funds have been put to exceptionally good use. We're now supporting some 42,000 individuals with developmental disabilities. Direct funding for passport now to more than 19,000 individuals. And we're currently supporting some 18,000 individuals for residential support.

MPP Campbell to Premier Wynne (Duguid) Campbell to Duguid Re: Electricity rates in rural Ontario

>> Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. According to statistics Canada, there are about 1.8 million people who live in rural Ontario. The Premier has told Ontarians in rural -- and rural Ontarians that they will see an additional 12% in average savings off their hydro bills from an enhanced rural rate relief program. But as it turns out, only 330,000 rural customers will see the extra savings, including nonresidential customers. When will the government tell the people in Kenora- Rainy River how many of them will be getting 20% off their hydro bills and how many won't?

>> Minister Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the changes that we made are going to provide \$110 million of support and relief to rural and global customers. Mr. Speaker, that information was put forward when the Minister made the announcement so it was very clear to those residents, Mr. Speaker, as to where it applies and where it doesn't. Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister's worked very, very closely with communities to identify where this applies and where it doesn't but at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, every resident in Ontario gets an 8% discount off their bill. That's where it starts. 8% off their bill. Significant, Mr. Speaker. [Unclear] From residents and they responded. We know that there are challenges in rural Ontario. And we know, Mr. Speaker, that we've responded to that because depending on where they're at, whether they're remote communities or not they'll be getting up to 20% off their bill.

>> Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. New regulations will force local utilities to start adding special government messaging about the rural rate relief on their hydro bills but you can get that those bills won't mention that most northern and rural Ontarians are not getting the full 12% savings in the rural rate relief. And they need relief. One woman in my riding recently wrote to me about the out-of-control hydro rates. She said, quote, my husband is on disability. My goal now is to work until 70 and then drop dead, end quote, because she simply can't afford to pay her hydro bills and too many others in Kenora Rainy River are literally being driven out of the province because of the high hydro rates. When will the Premier tell us how many people in Kenora- Rainy River will actually get the full 12% in rural rate relief and how many people will just another high bill with government spin?

>>Minister Duguid: Mr. Speaker, -- the new regulation includes an additional \$110 million in support for rural and remote residents. Speaker, it's very important that we do that. It does depend on whether they're in an urban area. Those roles have been outlined and they'll have to work to determine where in fact those residents live. We've been very clear about our residents right across this province get about -- an 8% discount. We've rose. We've responded. Mr. Speaker, we're ensuring those residents get a break on their energy bills. Mr. Speaker, I think that's what the people of this province expect and I think they'll be very pleased to get that. It would be nice if the NDP Were positive about it. Thank you.

MPP Kiwala to Minister Flynn Re: preventing workplace injury\lies

>> Sophie Kiwala: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of labour. Often when we think of occupational injuries we think of those that cannot be seen by looking at a person, a cut or a broken bone. Over the course of the last few years, we have heard more about all sorts of injuries that can occur in workplaces that we cannot spot by simply looking at someone. Mental health is an example of this. Another example are pains and strains or M.S. D.s, musculoskeletal disorders, exactly the type of work being researched by Dr. Rainbow and his team at the state-of-the-art high-speed imaging laboratory at queen's university. These injuries can be debilitating and impact Ontarians on working to their full potential or even at all. Can the Minister please share with the House what the ministry of labour is doing to prevent M.S. D.s in Ontario workplaces?

>> Minister Flynn: Speaker, thank you to the member for Kingston and the Islands for her tremendous advocacy when it comes to occupational health and safety, Speaker. She's correct. Not only illnesses, not only injuries can take place in the workplace are actually ones that we can see, Speaker. Every day workers in this province use their muscles, their tendons, their ligaments, their joints. They lift, they carry, sit and stand. They move in a variety of ways, Speaker, in order to do the work in the job they have. Sometimes that can put a little bit too much demand on your body, can cause pain and discomfort but it can lead to more serious injuries, Speaker, and can lead to something called M.S. D. October is the month we recognize ergonomics, Speaker. At the ministry of labour our health and safety partners will be raising awareness of M.S. D.s right throughout the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity. To encourage employers and workers to take part in these planned activities. It's going to prevent injuries, Speaker.