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Date: Thu, 28 Sep 2017 11:55:32 -0400

Estimates Committee Transcript from Instant Hansard:

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It seems that the issue with the Auditor is still ongoing. I appreciate that three senior bureaucrats in the financial area decided that if the Auditor didn't like it, they were going to not sign off themselves or what have you. But typically the way these Auditor's reports are, they do challenge the bureaucracy and each Tuesday our committee sits with the Auditor but also with deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers to talk about this.

I just want to go through the news release that the Auditor put out on September 7. This concerns me, because I feel like there is a hole in the budgets, it's about \$1.4 billion. She says that as well. She says, "I have issued a qualified audit opinion because the statements were not prepared following Canadian public sector accounting standards. The legislature and all Ontarians must be able to rely on the province's consolidated financial statements to fairly report the fiscal results for the year. This year they cannot do so."

She said there were two issues in the province's consolidated financial statements that failed to confirm, she says, to the Canadian public service accounting standards—forever here known as PSAS—which led her to issue a qualified opinion. First, relating to the government's accounting for its calculated surplus of \$12.429 billion for two pension funds it co-sponsors, Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan and OPSEU. "As well, the government's half of the actual funded surpluses within these two pension funds is only \$5.7 billion, which is considerably lower than the government's calculated surplus on its consolidated financial statements."

She said she's had extensive consultations with outside experts. Her office's position is consistent with the TTC, BC, New Brunswick, who all adopted this PSAS. This was also consistent, as I mentioned this morning, with what we heard from the Canadian Council of Public Accounts committees and auditors. She did look at your panel's report, rejected it though because they "are not an authoritative source on the application of" the CPSAS. I should just write that all down.

All that brings me to look at, well, who is on this committee? I sort of threw out something this morning. I had asked you if they had any political affiliation, to which you said, "No, none." I took your word for it, but then we went upstairs, my staff and I. We looked through some of these folks.

Murray Gold was a board member, a former Liberal riding president in Wellington–Halton Hills between 2014 and 2016. He's donated \$2,700 to the Ontario Liberals and over \$3,300 to the federal Liberals. Uros Karadzic—I'm not sure if that's the right number—but he donated to both the federal Liberals and your party. Paul Martin works for the Liberal premier of New Brunswick and it was during a similar dispute with the Auditor General there.

Hon. Liz Sandals: He's the comptroller.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Bureaucrats can laugh and so can ministers of the crown, but I have an opportunity here for 20 minutes that sort of lays out the fact that some of these folks are aligned

with your political party. When I threw it out there earlier and I didn't expect, I thought, "Surely to heavens, they wouldn't have had a whole bunch of their friends appointed to a committee in order to disprove an independent and impartial officers of this Legislature and go on a two-year crusade to try and discredit her and undermine her based on the work that she's done.

Of course, we in the Ontario Legislative Assembly take our work at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts very seriously. I feel we all have, who work on the public accounts committee, have a good relationship with the auditor. So I was quite surprised when I saw all this and the fact that not only did they undermine the Ontario Auditor General, but then they were compensated to the tune of \$200,000, I take that very seriously. They're paid public money.

One of the things that I thought was pretty outstanding when we were at the public accounts meeting just this past September, we worked with a group that does public accounting and they reminded me of something very profound, that public money has no party. So, when we're looking at a budget, that's public money. It's not Liberal Party money, it's not Progressive Conservative Party money, it's not New Democratic money or Green Party money, it's public money. We've all seen—and all of our parties have done it—where they have appointed people to make their positions. I just would like to remind that when we have the Auditor General making a point on public money, it seems and it resonates more with me and I think members of the public that she is giving an independent and unbiased view.

What I see here is a view that is skewed towards more of a caucus or a government or a party line rather than what's in the best interests of public funds and what's in it for the funds that people send to Queen's Park through their taxes, whether that's their gas tax or whether that's their income tax, whether that's through sales tax, whether that's through fees and what have you. Then, that's why I looked, with the Auditor General saying we've got a \$1.4-billion hole at this period of time and I wonder how the government justifies this. The auditor challenged them to present a letter from the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, as well as the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, to provide permission to use that asset.

I know that's a lot, Minister, but I wanted all of that on the record and I wanted to know from you: Have you received letters from both those unions to justify that their assets can be used by the government, and if a similar dispute arises this year, is the public expected to once again foot the bill for an advisory committee or a panel to you to undermine the Auditor General?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Interesting. I wonder if you checked what riding Mr. Gold was a party president in.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Wellington–Halton Hills.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Yes. And do you know anything about Wellington–Halton Hills? The riding of Wellington–Halton Hills happens to surround the riding of Guelph.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: So this was a partisan appointment—

Hon. Liz Sandals: I am very familiar—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —a patronage appointment partisan from you for a friend?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I am very, very familiar with Murray Gold who is the riding president or has been, of Wellington–Halton Hills riding association—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: So was this a partisan political—

Hon. Liz Sandals: Would you please listen to me?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: No. I'm just questioning—

Hon. Liz Sandals: I listened to you.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): One at a time, please.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I listened to you. You can listen to me.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You have to respect it's my question time.

Hon. Liz Sandals: There is a Mr. Gold who is in fact an active member of the Liberal riding association in Wellington-Halton Hills. I have in fact appeared at many events that Mr. Gold, who is the president of that riding association, has organized because he is the adjacent riding to mine. I absolutely can 100% assure you, because I know the gentleman, that he is not the Murray Gold who was appointed to the panel.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Okay. Yes, sorry.

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Colle: Hey. We need a retraction.

Hon. Liz Sandals: The Murray Gold who was appointed to the panel—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Order.

Mr. Mike Colle: Hey, I think we need a retraction here, an apology.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Point of order, Ms. MacLeod.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It looks like the research I was given was misinformed, and I'd like to apologize.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Yes, it certainly was.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: And I'm just getting to that. Let me finish.

Mr. Mike Colle: Point of order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Okay. We have another point of order. Mr. Colle.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm just trying to apologize and retract—

Mr. Mike Colle: I think this is a very serious matter. She has attacked the reputation of a citizen who has no role here. I think the committee and the person who was, basically, unfairly attacked on the public record deserve a written apology from this committee and the member saying that this was a faulty example of PC research, and that innocent Ontario citizen deserves that apology. I think that's a motion I'd like to put forward here.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Okay.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: May I speak, Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Ms. MacLeod, do you want to respond?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Yes, I do unreservedly apologize to both the minister as well as the individual that was mentioned. I'll be happy to write a letter, and I'll be happy to retract it and have it stricken.

Mr. Mike Colle: I think the committee should also send an apology.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm still speaking.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Okay, one at a time, please.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It would have been helpful, when I did mention that, had the minister corrected me at the time. Having said that, I do—

Hon. Liz Sandals: I attempted to.

Mr. Mike Colle: You couldn't get a word in edgewise.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Okay, order, order. We're going back to Ms. MacLeod; she still

has minutes on the clock.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: How many minutes do I have?

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): About three.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I do notice, though, they didn't walk back the other two appointments that we did have concerns with.

I would point out it's interesting also today that we had some time in the House where a Liberal MPP would have had the opportunity to apologize to northern Ontarians, but chose not to. It was a piece of information that I got from an old friend of mine, John Baird, who said—

Mr. Mike Colle: Point of order.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Point of order, Mr. Colle.

Mr. Mike Colle: Again, I ask that this committee consider that motion whereby this committee send an apology to Mr. Gold, who was unfairly maligned by the member—

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Slandered.

Mr. Mike Colle: And slandered by the member in open session here. I think this offhanded apology is not sufficient. Given the details she went into, we need this committee to make—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I'm going to halt you there, Mr. Colle. We are actually dealing with the motion on the floor; it is not the one that you put forward. I'm going to consult procedurally after this, but let's get back to business.

Ms. MacLeod, you've got now two and a bit minutes.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Okay. Thanks very much, Chair. Again, my apologies to Mr. Gold. These mistakes happen with research, and that's not—it's unfortunate, but, again, the Liberals are just shouting over us, every single time. You make a mistake, you own up to it. They can't do that in the House. I'm happy to do that. I'm happy to say I'm sorry to the minister for that one issue.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: You didn't say it.

Mr. Todd Smith: She said it four times.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I've said it four times. We can go through it all, we can send a letter. If the minister would be happy to bring, tomorrow, to hearings, this individual's address, I'll personally send a note. But, at the same time, let's not forget: This is a Liberal government that has a \$1.4-billion hole in its budget, and the slander that they have engaged in against Ontario's Auditor General—

Mr. Mike Colle: You're the only one slandering.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Order. Can we get back to the purpose for this committee? You are asking questions of the minister. Can you wrap up, please?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Sure. Again, I point out that the Auditor General has problems with the 2017-18 estimates as a result of the public accounts. She has offered two qualified opinions on this Liberal government. The Liberals instead decided they were going to create a panel that we have paid \$200,000 of Ontario taxpayer money in order to undermine an independent, impartial, unbiased officer of this assembly, and we have not received any answers as to why that happened.

Again, Chair, it's disappointing that when a mistake here was made, the government would instead prefer to yell and shout me down and slander me and call for things that I've offered—and then the Liberals laugh.

So there you have it. Chair, I'll just cede the rest of my time. We'll pick this up in 20 minutes.

