

Summary of Question Period for Monday November 20, 2017

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MPP Smith (PC) to Minister Thibeault (Energy) re: requested rate hike and salary of CEO of Hydro One.

>>MPP Smith: Thank you, Speaker. My question this morning is for the Premier. Speaker, last week Premier Wynne's \$4.5 million man mayo Schmidt C.E.O. Of Hydro One was back in the news again as he delivered remarks at the empire club, the four-and-a-half-million-dollar man was calling for higher hydro rates once again. In fact Hydro One is requesting higher hydro rates right now. So, Mr. Speaker, will the government promise that they will stop this proposed hydro rate hike now?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So let me talk about something that I'm sure the member from the opposition hasn't read and it's called the fair hydro plan. And in the fair hydro plan, he should be aware that no matter the outcome of the application brought forward by Hydro One, the rate application will be held to the cost of inflation for the next four years, Mr. Speaker. That makes sure that we can keep rates as low as possible. We've reduced them by 25% and I'm sure that he hasn't heard that as well, Mr. Speaker, because that is helping every single family in this province. We've reduced rates by 25%, and as I mentioned we're making sure that we're holding these rates to the cost of inflation for the next four years. Hydro One and its application, Mr. Speaker, are being brought forward. It's being brought to the O.E.B.. The o.e.b.'s going to review the application but the costs will stay at the rate of inflation, Mr. Speaker .

>>MPP Smith: Sounds to me, Speaker, like the government is prepared to let that 5% increase in hydro rates go ahead. They'll just borrow billions of dollars more to make sure that it doesn't appear on bills now but we know because we have read the unfair Liberal hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, that the rates are going to skyrocket after the next election. That's according to their own Cabinet documents. The Hydro One C.E.O. Makes \$4.5 million. Then he gives a speech at a swanky downtown Toronto hotel. What does he tell the audience? How this is justifiable when Hydro One service has become less reliable but more expensive. The auditor says because of aging equipment we have a higher risk of failing infrastructure. That really just goes to show how out of touch that this government has become. So, Mr. Speaker, if the government won't stop the rate hike, it looks like they're prepared to borrow billions of dollars more to pay for it, will the Premier at least tell the people of Ontario that she doesn't support this rate hike?..

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As usual say one thing and do another

from the other side. So when, when the Hydro One executive was awarded -- When the Hydro One C.E.O. Was awarded the Ontario electricity or energy association's leader of the year, which she attended, he stood and applauded with everyone else, Mr. Speaker. And now he's standing here to slam the C.E.O. The C.E.O. that has found \$75 million in savings, the C.E.O. That is actually changing the company to make sure that they're more customer focused, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about what Hydro One is doing to ensure that they can continue to operate and be customer focused, Mr. Speaker. They've actually voluntarily ended winter disconnections. They voluntarily returned security deposits, Mr. Speaker. They're doing a great job as a company and making sure that they keep the lights on right across the province.

>>MPP Coe: Speaker, I'm going to say this really slowly. Very, very clearly. We are not criticizing the C.E.O. of Hydro One. We're criticizing this Premier and this government who gave him a salary of \$4.5 million, ten times what his counterparts are receiving in other parts -- in other provinces of Canada. Mr. Speaker, the government sits across from us and claims that they've rebuilt the system. What a crock, because the C.E.O. At Hydro One is standing up before an audience downtown saying the reason he has to come to them now looking for a nearly 5% increase is because of aging infrastructure and the government has to -- hasn't repaired what they said they have repaired. They haven't modernized the system. If they'd done what they claimed, the 4-and-a-half million-dollar man wouldn't be asking for more money to do just that, would he? Mr. Speaker, why is the Premier's 4-and-a-half million-dollar man trying to hike hydro rates to apparently rebuild the system if the Liberals already have rebuilt the system?

>>Minister Thibeault: Again, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Always pleased to talk about and remind the opposition about the fair hydro plan in which rates are being held to the cost of inflation for the next four years. We've also seen a 25% reduction for every single family and House hold right across the province. On top of that, Mr. Speaker, we've got families that live in rural and northern parts of our community that are seeing anywhere between 40 and 50%. And I know, Mr. Speaker, we're getting you and close to around 300 days since they said they might talk about a plan, maybe show us something. Even an iota of what they would do, Mr. Speaker, but they don't because they have no idea, no idea what to do to help those folks that are suffering, Mr. Speaker, right now with higher energy bills. That's why we brought forward the fair hydro plan. That's why we voted in favour of it, Mr. Speaker. And that's why they'll continue to vote against anything that will help the people of Ontario.

MPP Tabuns (NDP) to Minister Thibeault (Energy) re: CEO of Hydro One

>>MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question to the Premier. Last week the C.E.O. of the privatized Hydro One defended sharp rate increases he's seeking to benefit investors. He told the empire club that the rate increases were needed for capital investments to keep the system reliable. But the Ontario energy board didn't believe this. They told Hydro One to reduce its revenue demands. Hydro One has basically refused and came back with nearly the same demand. Let's be clear. Hydro One is not seeking this money to improve service. It wants this money so it can build an empire, including its ridiculous \$6 billion purchase of Avistav. Why is the Premier allowing Hydro One to expand its monopoly at ratepayers' expense?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to Hydro One's ask into the O.E.B., it is just that, Mr. Speaker. It's an ask and the O.E.B. will do its due diligence and again review this application. But let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. The fair hydro plan talks about the 25% reduction that we've brought forward for all families right across this province, all residences, Mr. Speaker. And then of course for 500,000 small businesses and farms. That 25% is taking effect and then the cost, Mr. Speaker, will rise only by the cost of inflation for the next four years. So, Mr. Speaker, Hydro One is looking at what its needs are. It's put forward its plans to continue to make our system reliable. We spent \$70 billion making sure we could rebuild this system, Mr. Speaker. And we need to continue to maintain t.that's what this ask is about. The O.E.B. Will review it with always making sure that it keeps the best interests of customers in mind, Mr. Speaker .

>>MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again for the Premier. Two years ago the Premier promised us Hydro One would lower hydro rates -- excuse me -- after it became a private corporation. But the privatized Hydro One refuses to lower rates even, even after the Premier gave it a \$2.6 billion tax cut. In fact Hydro One's taking the Ontario energy board to court so it can keep 100% of that tax break and leave nothing for ratepayers. It's refusing to be regulated by the O.E.B. And demanding sharp rate increases in order to expand its monopoly, while doing nothing to improve its performance for Ontario families and businesses. Will the Premier finally admit her sell-off of Hydro One has been a complete failure?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ownership of Hydro One does not change how rates are reviewed by the O.E.B., Mr. Speaker. It also does not change the fact that rates will only go up by the rate of inflation, Mr. Speaker, not by the fear mongering coming from the NDP But let's look very clearly at what's happened with Hydro One rates, Mr. Speaker. Urban customers have seen a 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker, just like every other family right across the province. On top of that, Mr. Speaker, the rates for Hydro One r1 and r2 customers have dropped between 40 and 50%, Mr. Speaker. That is a huge reduction for those families. On top of that, Mr. Speaker, Hydro One has voluntarily stepped forward and cancelled the winter disconnections. They've stepped forward and voluntarily ended the security deposits, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to seeing a company grow, they're actually growing and becoming more customer focused and making sure the money that we got from the broadening of the ownership that we can use to build infrastructure right across the province.

MPP Mantha (NDP) to the Premier – re: Grassy Narrows

>>MPP Mantha: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. We recently learned that the Liberal government has confirmation that grassy narrows first nation is still being exposed to Mercury poisoning through the contamination of the wab goon river. But the Premier said that the report that confirms this delivered to the government in September of 2016 never made it to her desk. The Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation said it wasn't a communication breakdown and that the ministries don't -- and I quote -- keep the Premier up to date in the dark. But if the Premier is to be believed, that is exactly what happened. This is a glaring mistake that shines inconfidence in the ministry of indigenous relations and reconciliation and this Liberal government in general. Why didn't the Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation. Tell the Premier that he had confirmation of a systematic poisoning of an entire indigenous community?

>> **Premier Wynne:** Speaker, this is an extremely important issue. What happened at grassy narrows decades ago, Mr. Speaker, has to be rectified. When I was Minister of then Aboriginal affairs, Mr. Speaker, I travelled to grassy narrows. I met with the community. I met with the chief, Mr. Speaker. I came back to the ministry and we -- you know, we work to determine, Mr. Speaker, if there was science available that it would allow us to -- one of the things we were concerned about, Mr. Speaker, was the disturbing of Mercury in the water system would actually make the situation worse. As soon, Mr. Speaker, as I learned through a meeting with David Suzuki and the Dr. John Rude, Mr. Speaker, we learned that there was new science -- John Rude, that there was new science, the ability to clean up the system. That's why this \$85 million, Mr. Speaker, that is set aside. At work. The scientists are there, Mr. Speaker. That cleanup is beginning. This has to be rectified, Mr. Speaker, and we are the government that has acted on that.

>> **MPP Mantha:** Again to the **Premier**. The **Premier** is just one person. She has an entire team of staff, Cabinet Ministers working for her. It's hard to believe that no one in the Liberal government thought that this information was important or that it would save indigenous lives. This report should have raised alarm bells throughout this entire Liberal government. What disciplinary action is the **Premier** planning for her Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation for this potentially life threatening oversight?

>> **Premier Wynne:** You know, Mr. Speaker, there should have been alarm bells in the 1970s. There should have been alarm bells in the 1980s. There should have been alarm bells in the 1990s, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the fact is it has taken until now for this government to act. Because previous governments did not take action, Mr. Speaker. And you know what? The reality is that it was not clear exactly what the science was, exactly what action should be taken but we have now taken action. This was a poisoning of a water system, Mr. Speaker, that should not have happened. When it does, Mr. Speaker, it raises huge cautionary notes in terms of how we go forward, how we continue to work with our indigenous -- with indigenous peoples, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that such a thing never happens again. And that is why, that is why the Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation spent so much of his time. Working with communities, working with chiefs. We're going to be meeting with the chiefs of Ontario today, Mr. Speaker, because we know that those relationships have to change and so that something like this never happens again.

MPP Thompson (NDP) to the Premier and Minister Ballard (Environment) re: Grassy Narrows

>> **MPP Thompson:** My question's for the **Premier**. Last Wednesday the Canadian press reported despite the Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation receiving a report in September of 2016 about cleanup of the near creek contamination in the English was beagoon river upstream from the grassy nations first nation the **Premier** had the audacity to say she never saw the report. Speaker, the report in its entirety can be found with a simple two-minute Google search. This is an issue which the government has had more than a decade to address. Is the **Premier** really saying that there's an entire year of inaction on this issue, because her office can perform a simple Google search?

>> **Premier Wynne:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I not Minister of indigenous relations will want to speak to this. But I just need to reinforce what I said in the previous answer, Mr. Speaker.

What happened at grassy narrows and the Mercury poisoning in the water, Mr. Speaker, that we all know is a hugely problematic thing for the community surrounding that area, Mr. Speaker. That, you know, should have not have happened in the first place, and then decade after decade, Mr. Speaker, there was no action taken. Part of the reason for that was that it wasn't clear exactly what the science was to get that Mercury cleaned up. We know now, Mr. Speaker, what has to be done. We have set aside \$85 million. That \$85 million, Mr. Speaker, is already working. There are scientists there, Mr. Speaker, who are getting ready to put the infrastructure and the mechanisms in place to get that cleaned up, Mr. Speaker. **Premier Wynne:** There's more that needs to be done. We had understand that. That's why we have set aside that money. We are the government that is taking action on cleaning up what should never have happened in the first place, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Thompson: Speaker, this is an issue about competency and trust. This report -- and I'm going back to the **Premier** with this -- this report, yes. It's the foundation of an \$85 million cleanup fund, an important part of reconciliation with the grassy narrows and B.C. First Nation nations. Yet the **Premier** admits she knew nothing about this plan just last week. So this is very unsettling, Speaker. We would expect a **Premier** to have command of all of her file. Who is to blame for this incompetency? And what is going to happen? Is it the **Premier's** office or the Minister ? Who's going to be fired over this inaction?

>>Minister Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. It's an opportunity for me to talk about some of the things that are happening in grassy narrows. Hike my -- like my predecessor and Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation and the Prime Minister , our priority has been grassy narrows. It was the first community I visited when I became Minister of environment and climate change. We've been working, Speaker, with that community and wabaseamong community for many years to identify Mercury, to put the right science in place so that we can begin the remediation, the Mercury remediation of the wab buy gone English river system. Wab goon. We got the dead dedicated \$85 million fund. We've already put in place 5.2 million dollars. We have drilled on-site testing right now.