

Summary of Question Period for Tues. Nov. 14, 2017

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MPP Brown (PC) to Minister Sandals re: the November Financial Update

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy **Premier**. There's a lot of talk about the Liberals' mythical balanced budget, and it's not just the financial accountability officer who's saying the government's numbers are wrong. It's the auditor general. Last year she said the government significantly understated the deficit. Ant books, I quote, were not prepared following the Canadian public sector accounting standards. She added that 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 can't. So now you've got not only the financial accountability officer. You have the auditor general saying the government's numbers do not add up. And then rather than answer something that's not related to the question, I've got a very specific question to the Deputy **Premier**. The F.A.O. And auditor general are saying the government's numbers are wrong. In this financial update we're getting this week, can we be assured that the numbers are actually going to be agreed upon by legislative officer? Yes or no?

>> Minister Sandals: Yes. Thank you very much, Speaker. And I can give you the one-word answer, yes. The budget is balanced. In fact we are on -- Budget -- yes, the budget is balanced. We are on track to balance the budget this year. And do you know what that means, Speaker is this that means that instead of slashing and burning services people rely on, we choose do to invest in the people of Ontario to bring the province out of the recession. Progressive policies like full-day kindergarten, free tuition that will insure that the labour force of the future is well educated, well trained over the long term, not to mention the historical infrastructure investments -- Of 190 billion over 13 years and our private economists who agree with our projection.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Deputy **Premier**. My question was will the F.A.O. And auditor general agree with the numbers? It should be very worrisome to everyone in Ontario that you have numbers that the government's presenting that the legislative oversight are saying are incorrect. This is unparalleled. You've got the F.A.O. And the auditor general saying not only are the numbers wrong that government's making up their own accounting rules. And if it's not good enough that you've got legislative oversight saying that you're wrong, the highly respected don Drummond, which this

government has praised before, has said by no means are they completely out of the physical woods. So everyone is saying your numbers are wrong. They do a specific kindness of at least admitting they make up their own rules? Of saying their numbers do not add up and we are in a deficit?

>>Minister Sandals: Thank you very much, and I wouldn't presume to speak for our independent officers. They're independent. However, what I can do is tell you about some other third-party numbers. So for example 800,000 net new jobs since the recession. The majority are in the private sector and in above-wage industries. About 94.1% of those new jobs are full time. That's not my data. That's statscan. The unemployment rate is 5.9%, which is below the national average for 31 straight months in a row. Lowest it's been in years. Those are not my numbers. Those are statscan numbers. What about the G.D.P.? Private-sector forecasts for real G.D.P. Growth is 2.9%. In 2017. North America leading. Increased from 2.4% since we presented our balanced budget.

MPP Brown (PC) to the Premier re: November Financial Update

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the **Premier**. Today it appears the Minister of finance will double down on his claims that Ontario has a balanced budget. Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Let's start with the financial accountability officer in May of 2017, the F.A.O. said spring outlook said we will continue to be in budget deficit for the next five years. Five years, Mr. Speaker. He stated further, beginning in 2018 and '19 the F.A.O. is projecting a steady deterioration in the budget deficit. So, Mr. Speaker, we have the Minister of finance pretending we have a balanced budget. We have F.A.O. Chosen and agreed to by the government saying that it is not accurate, that we're in a significant deficit. So my question to the **Premier** is who's right. The Minister of finance and his political spin, or the non-partisan F.A.O.?

>> **Premier Wynne**: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let's look at some objective realities, Mr. Speaker. The fact is Ontario is leading economic growth in the country, Mr. Speaker. Our unemployment rate is the lowest in 17 years, Mr. Speaker. We are seeing job creation, Mr. Speaker, just this year 125,000 net new jobs, 800,000 net new jobs since the recession, Mr. Speaker. The reality is Ontario is doing very well. But here's the other reality and the Minister of finance will be speaking to this as well. Not everyone in this province is sharing in that, Mr. Speaker. Not everyone is feeling that benefit evenly. And so, Mr. Speaker, what we are doing as a government is we are putting in place supports, making sure that people have access in a fair way, Mr. Speaker, that they have access to opportunity across the province. Whether it's students who will benefit and are benefitting from free tuition, whether it's young people starting in January. Who will get pre prescription medication or whether it's the millions of people who will benefit from an increased minimum wage. That's the fairness

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the **Premier**. I had pretty specific questions and that the Minister of finance says the budget is balanced, yet the F.A.O., the nonpartisan legislative oversight agreed to the government to make sure that facts are correct and the numbers are correct. That officer that the government agree today is saying the government's numbers are wrong and not just by a little bit. The financial accountability officer's economic and fiscal outlook predicts that Ontario's deficit will be \$2.6 billion. So, Mr. Speaker, again to the **Premier**. Rather than talking about something, nothing related to the question, I want to know who is right with their numbers? Is it the F.A.O., which is

the nonpartisan legislative oversight, or is it the Minister of finance and their fake Liberal spin?

>> **Premier Wynne:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's interesting -- I think it's interesting that the leader of the opposition would suggest that the economic well-being of the citizens of this province have nothing to do with the economy of the province. This notion, Mr. Speaker. The fact that there are millions of people in Ontario who can't look after themselves because they're earning \$11.60 an hour and they will see a minimum wage increase -- An increase to their wage as of January 1st, Mr. Speaker. I think that will make a material difference to the people who are -- Who are struggling to make ends meet. Mr. Speaker, the reality is that if this leader of the opposition doesn't think that creating fairness in this province, creating opportunity in this province when we're living in a province that is leading economic growth in the country. If he doesn't think that that's a priority, then he is completely off track in terms of what we believe as a government, Mr. Speaker

MPP Sattler (NDP) to the Premier and Minister Matthews - re: continuing college strike

>>MPP Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the **Premier**. Speaker, last week's announcement of a hardship fund for some of the 500,000 College students who have been financially disadvantaged by the strike, is cold comfort to students who are seeing their dreams slip away as this strike drags on, who are experiencing skyrocketing rates of anxiety and depression with few resources on campus to assist them, who are being forced to turn down job offers and are worried how they will be able to support themselves. Speaker, if the Minister can direct the Colleges to create a hardship fund, why doesn't she direct the Colleges to go back to the table and work out a negotiated settlement -- Bring stability not chaos for the College system?

>> **Premier Wynne:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I am completely sympathetic with the students who want to be back in the classroom. They need to be back in the classroom, Mr. Speaker, and I know that Colleges have a responsibility to put in place contingency plans, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that students don't lose this semester, Mr. Speaker. I know also that faculty want to be back in the classroom and my understanding is that faculty will begin voting on the employer's last offer through the olrb beginning today, Mr. Speaker. We want every student in our College system back in class as quickly as possible, Mr. Speaker. But I know that the member opposite understands the process. We need to let that unfold, Mr. Speaker, and we will work as hard as we can to make sure that young people get back into the classroom as quickly as possible.

>>MPP Sattler: Again to the **Premier**. Speaker, with no resolution in sight until at least the end of this week and that is by no means certain, the College strike has entered uncharted territory in the history of College labour relations. The risk of losing a semester is very, very real for students. Students are worried that they will have to repay osap for education they did not receive. When St. Lawrence College student Morgan Campbell called the **Premier's** office to share her concern, she was told to call welfare. Speaker, is this really the best advice this Liberal government can offer to students when it is their failure to properly fund the system that created the conditions for this strike and their inaction that has allowed the strike to drag on past the breaking point?

>>Minister Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. Since this strike began, my focus has been very clearly on the student. I have spoken with students. I have spoken to parents. I've spoken to grandparents, Speaker, all of whom are really concerned that their -- that their child or grandchild or they themselves are in danger of losing a semester. It is vitally important that this strike get resolved and get resolved quickly, Speaker. We do respect the Collective bargaining process. The Colleges are in -- bargaining with OPSEU, Speaker. We must respect that process, but at the same time we must keep our eye on students. They are facing real anxiety, as the member opposite has said. They are facing real challenges, financial and otherwise. And that's why -- We're asking that Colleges create a dedicated fund to support those students. >> Thank you, speaker. My question is to the premier. Speaker, last week's announcement of a hardship fund for some of the 500,000 college students who have been financially disadvantaged by the strike, is cold comfort to students who are seeing their dreams slip away as this strike drags on, who are experiencing skyrocketing rates of anxiety and depression with few resources on campus to assist them, who are being forced to turn down job offers and are worried how they will be able to support themselves. Speaker, if the minister can direct the colleges to create a hardship fund, why doesn't she direct the colleges to go back to the table and work out a negotiated settlement -- [Applause] Bring stability not chaos for the college system? [Applause]

MPP Campbell (NDP) to Minister Zimmer re: clean-up of Grassy Narrows

>>MPP Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the **Premier** or the Deputy **Premier**. The NDP Has repeatedly confronted the **Premier** and this government with evidence that people in grassy narrows and wabaseemong first nations were still getting sick from Mercury poisoning including young people. She said the Mercury was contained. She even warned that a full cleanup might make things worse. Now we know that her government has known all along that there was still Mercury contaminating the river and that this government has been concealing this truth. When did the **Premier** find out that the ground under the mill was still contaminated with Mercury, and who gave the order to keep this truth from the people grassy narrows?

>>Minister Zimmer: Thank you for that question. The domtar report, which has been in the news recently, Speaker, was received by the ministry in September 16. It is the position of this government that all information related to the Mercury situation on grassy narrows first nation and on the English wabigoon river should be transparently shared. The ministry is reviewing that report now to see what the consequences of that report are and what should be done. I should say, Speaker, that we have a plan in place to deal with the Mercury pollution on grassy narrow on the domtar site. We are working with grassy narrows first nation, with white dog first nation. We are working with the ministry officials. We have committed to clean up the Mercury site there.

>>MPP Campbell: Speaker, the fact of the matter is that this government has had that report in its possession for over a year. And this government has always known this information. This is not new information. The Minister did not let the people of grassy narrows know. How is that transparent? Instead, a few months after receiving the report, he told this House that, quote, there is no source unquote of Mercury contamination. The people of grassy narrows and wabaseemong first nations deserve to know why they

have not been told the truth. Will the Premier tell us when she knew about the contamination and who gave the order to conceal this truth?

>>Minister Zimmer: Speaker, the ministry, the government received this report in September '16. We are committed to resolving this issue. I can tell you, Speaker, that in the past year or so I have been to grassy narrows twice. I have met with the chief at grassy narrows. And the chiefs of white dog. I have had meetings with former Minister Murray on two occasions, with the leaders from the communities. We have had meetings with the federal -- the then federal Minister, Minister Bennett. We are committed to this. We have recently provided about \$5.2 million. To support pre-remediation work, and subsequent to that we've set aside \$85 million for remediation efforts. This government is serious about dealing with this issue.

MPP Thompson (PC), MPP Yurek (PC) and MPP Clark (PC) to the Premier and Minister Hoskins re: extended health bureaucracy

>>MPP Thompson: Thank you very much, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Last week many Ontarians were shocked to learn of a new secret home care agency that her government will be creating. What we want to know is who she consulted with in creating this agency. **Was anyone other than the organization writing hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of attack ads on behalf of the Liberals even consulted?** This is a question of ethics, Speaker, not merit. We want to know about the relationship that the Premier and her Liberal government had with its former party president. Speaker, I have a straightforward yes or no question -- will the Premier do the right thing and release all of the correspondence that her office had with the sciu and all other -- Relevant stakeholders ahead of the home care changes announced in October?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is going to want to speak on the specifics, but, Mr. Speaker, you know, our priority, with a very complex issue in terms of making sure that the people who we love, the people who raised us, the people who have built this province, that they have the care that they need and that they want, Mr. Speaker. And that means that there needs to be a range of care. You know I hear the heckling from the other side. They've had a lot of time. We have been investing in home care, Mr. Speaker. We have been working to make that transformation in the health care system that actually gives people who are needing care in their homes or in the community those options, Mr. Speaker. We continue to look for ideas. We continue to look for models, Mr. Speaker, that will provide better care for people who either -- Want to stay in their homes, want want to stay in the community or want, Mr. Speaker, long-term care. That's our priority is making sure those people have the care that they need.

>>MPP Yurek: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Premier. In her 2015 report of community care access centres, the auditor general found serious issues. **The government was spending 39% of their total budget on administration costs alone.** They created a needlessly complex system that resulted in gaps in care and left patients suffering. And now we're hearing the government has quietly put forward a plan for **new home care bureaucracy with zero consultation with industry stakeholders.** Instead of spending precious dollars on home care and patients, **this government has been set up to**

expand the bureaucracy to the benefit of their Liberal insider friend. Given the government's poor home care track record, this will clearly not benefit patients. Can the Premier explain why this announcement was buried at the bottom of a press release and rushed through with no consultation? And will the Minister commit to exposing any involvement sciu has had?

>>Minister Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite had have been paying attention, he would have known in early October that at kensington, that is a tremendous provider of home care services. They have a hospice as well. They have a residential setting for individuals that require support. He would have known that in early October, I spoke in front of many media representatives, many cameras at the same time that we announced an increase in our funding to home care across this province. But I specific and emphatically described this model, which is in fact -- that has been used successfully in California, in Massachusetts, in Michigan. Oregon and many other places around the world. The mod ole that we're following to give choice to those who require home care,

>>MPP Clark: Thanks, Speaker. Back to the Premier. For years this Liberal government has looked out for the interests of insiders and the well connected. First leaving everyday Ontarians paying more, working harder and getting less. This deal to create seiu-backed home care model certainly looks like history repeating itself. Described by some as having cozy ties with this government. Their G.R. Head is a former head, former president of the Liberal party.

Doesn't pass the smell test. Speaker my question to the Premier is simple. Just how much influence has Michael spitali have on the creation of this seiu-backed organization?

>>Minister Hoskins: So, Mr. Speaker, we're piloting -- We're piloting two new innovative self-directed care models. One model is we're going to provide funds directly to home care clients to purchase the services themselves but we need to acknowledge, there's a subset outside of that, roughly 6,000 people maximum across the province that don't want to remit taxes for their employees to revenue Canada, that don't want to negotiate or find a challenge to negotiate those contracts with employees. We're going to provide that subset with complex needs, more than 14 hours of home care needs a week with the opportunity to select and schedule their own personal support worker. We're going to do that and support them, as many jurisdictions in United States and around the world have done successfully.