

Summary of Question Period for Wed. Apr. 18, 2018

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Please see the attached select and full summaries of today's Question Period.

MPP Fedeli (PC) to Premier and Minister Sousa (Finance) re: credit rating

>> Vic Fedeli: Thank you. Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the **Premier**. Ontario has suffered another fiscal setback due solely to the actions of this **Premier**. Moody's credit rating agency has downgraded the province's credit outlook from stable to negative as a direct result of their election documents budget. Moody's said, quote -- spending pressure will challenge the province's ability to sustain balanced fiscal results across multiple years. Moody's also assumes the budget will lead to, quote, an upward trend in the debt burden and a faster rate in est expense than previously anticipated. Speaker, why is this **Premier**, in her shameless bid to cling to power, putting Ontario in an even more precarious financial position and harming Ontario's reputation in the process?

>> **Premier Wynne**: Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of finance is going to want to comment in the supplementary. Let me just say -- and this is part of the message that the member opposite neglected, which is tt Moody's has confirmed our double-a credit rating, Mr. Speaker. They have adjusted their outlook. We know that. But this is not a credit rating downgrade. Ontario's debt continues to be highly marketable and that reflects, Mr. Speaker, the confidence of investors in our economy. We do value the input of the rating agencies, Mr. Speaker. Our responsibility is, and it always will be, to support the C and opportunity for people in this province. That's the role of goverto do the things that people cannot do by themselves. I know that the Minister of finance is working with the rating agencies and he will comment, Mr. Speaker. But our credit rating has been confirmed, Mr. Speaker. And we will continue to work to make sure people in this province have -- the people of the province have everything that they need, Mr. Speaker .

>> Vic Fedeli: Back to the **Premier**. Speaker, this is not any kind of a forecast for moody's. This is an outright condemnation of this government's fiscal policies. The **Premier** likes to say she is making, quote, conscious choices that plunged Ontario into deficit. But the fact is that this government used money from reserves and the sale of assets to try to artificially balance the budget. Speaker, it's not a conscious choice. It's a consequence of onetime money running out. They ran out of things to sell, Speaker. This means we need more money to pay interest on our debt and less money is now available for needed services. So, Speaker, Moody's sees right through this cling to power. Does the **Premier** really expect Ontario families won't?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, and the member quotes moody's so I'm going to quote

moody as well. Here it is word for word -- the affirmation of the double-a rating for the province of Ontario reflects the province's ability to rely on a large, diversified economic base with sound wealth generation that support as strong provincial revenue base and greater degree of flexibility to accommodate revenue and expenditure pressures and prudent debt management, Mr. Speaker. Investors are investing in Ontario for a reason, because we're making it ham and we're relying on our economic engine of the economy to support all of Canada. We're the largest net contributor to the federation as well. Thank you.

>> Vic Fedeli: Back to the **Premier**. What the Minister failed to mention was how many down grades we had, and that's why we're only at aa, Speaker. The worst part of all this is the **Premier** has been warned time and time again about the consequences of her spend-at-all-costs approach. The auditor general repeatedly told us that increasing debt interest payments will crowd out the services families rely on. That's why the Liberals have closed hospital beds and fir 1,600 nurses, and that's why 100 front-line health care workers in Sudbury are worried about this jobs this very morning. The government's lack of financial discipline is exactly why they received a condemnation from Moody's. They can't be trusted, Speaker. Is this **Premier** proud that Liberal self-interests and a desperate attempt to cling to powers hurting Ontario's reputation?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, it's exactly because our fiscal discipline that we beat our targets year over year. Ninth year in a row, Mr. Speaker. We balanced the budget last year. We have a surplus of \$600 million. Furthermore we're the leanest government in all of Canada. Our interest on debt is a function of our revenue. Mr. Speaker, it was 15 cents for every dollar when they were over. Today it's under 8 cents, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to take what steps are necessary to invest unlike what this Minister is suggesting in this budget we have tremendous investments to provide for health care, public education, social programs, infrastructure spending. The very things that they say we should do, they're voting against, Mr. Speaker. The people of Ontario need a strong economy. We're diversifying that economy and Moody's has affirmed that the province of Ontario is being prudent in our debt management.

MPP Pettapiece, Scott and McNaughton to Minister Thibeault (Energy) re: Hydro One executive salary

>> MPP Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the **Premier**. Mr. Speaker, does the **Premier** believe \$6 million is an acceptable salary for the C.E.O. Of Hydro One?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, you know, I'm pleased to rise and talk to the same question. You know, we recognize that the executive style where you said Hydro One are high compared to the vast majority of Ontario salaries and we remain committed to regulation, accountability and transparency through our government's involvement as a majority shareholder. You know, Mr. Speaker, the gimmick that we're seeing from the other side, especially from the leader of that party, Mr. Speaker, is going to drive us down the same mess that we're seeing south of the border, Mr. Speaker. You know, this isn't going to do anything to actually take a single cent off of anyone's hydro bills, Mr. Speaker. Not one single cent. But you know what did, Mr. Speaker? Was our fair hydro plan. Our fair hydro plan makes sure that we reduce rates. By 25% on average, Mr. Speaker, and we'll continue to put forward policy and not

bumper stickers. Like the gimmick that they're doing, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the **Premier**. Mr. Speaker, to the **Premier**, is \$6 million an acceptable salary for the C.E.O. Of Hydro One?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, is voting against 25% reductions for families right across this province something that, you know, everyone should do, Mr. Speaker? Yes, it should, Mr. Speaker. And it's this party that did it. On that side of the House, we used to talk about them as being the party that had no plan, Mr. Speaker, and then they had a weekend where they brought forward a plan, and they were K the fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, and that was something that we thought was great but they should have voted for it when they had a chance. But now that plan has disappeared again, Mr. Speaker, and they are once again the party that has no plan. The only thing that they can talk about, Mr. Speaker, is Hydro One C.E.O. Salaries. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that executive salaries are high, but when it comes to actually making a difference in taking costs. Bills, Mr. Speaker, we reduced those especially in one areas by up to 50% because of our action, Mr. Speaker.

>> MPP McNaughton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the **Premier**. It is shocking to see the Liberals defend their \$6 million man. Mr. Speaker, how does the **Premier** defend the salaries of the Hydro One C.E.O.?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker. You know, Mr. Speaker, it's our government that understands that affordability is critical for families and businesses and, as I've said before, Mr. Speaker, that's why we launched Ontario's fair hydro plan reducing rates by 25% on average for all residential consumers as well as many a half a million small businesses and farms. And our plan is working, Mr. Speaker. You know, a recent report by the Environmental Commissioner reconfirmed Ontario's families and small businesses pay less on average than many other North American jurisdictions. Families in cities like New York, Boston and San Francisco pay more than double the average of Ontario and consumers in Charlottetown, Regina, Halifax and Moncton are paying more than the Ontario average, Mr. Speaker. By bringing down surprise -- prices for customers we're continue to increase fairness and create more opportunities for Ontario families, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to find ways and bring forward policy that help. They can keep bringing forward bumper sticker policies, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Wilson (PC) to the Premier and Minister Naqvi (Government House Leader) re: campaign style events and the Ontario taxpayer

>> MPP Wilson: Thank you, Speaker. This question's to the **Premier**. Speaker, the **Premier** held another campaign-style event this morning, this time at a Toronto hospital, and she's heading downtown later today for another platform announcement. This egregious abuse of years' money must come to an end. Speaker, how much are these campaign-style events costing taxpayers today?

>> **Premier Wynne**: Mr. Speaker, again I understand why the member opposite would focus on that and not the substance of the announcements THA are making relevant to our budget, Mr. Speaker, because making a nearly billion-dollar investment in hospitals, Mr. Speaker, could increase wait times when we are already, Mr. Speaker. We are already leading the country in terms of wait times, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I'll be talking -- I'll be talking about climate change, Mr. Speaker, with Michael Bloomberg and climate change in the of corporate responsibility. I am -- Quite sure that's a subject the member opposite really doesn't want to touch. Doesn't want to talk about climate change

and reining in corporate pollution, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Wilson: Back to the **Premier**. Even if the **Premier** wants to pretend otherwise, she's early campaigning on the taxpayers' dime. It's shady and it's unethical and it needs to stop. Withdraw, Mr. Speaker. Once again the Liberals had Minister s out this morning using taxpayers' money for campaign-style photo ops. Shame on you, **Premier**. Speaker, will the Liberal party do the GHT thing and pay back the taxpayers for these campaign-style events? You're out talking about your budget. You told us that was your platform. These are campaign-style events and they've got to stop.

>> Minister Naqvi: Thank you very much. Thanks to the member opposite for highlighting the Minister s are doing their job. Talking about things that is important to Ontarians, we're out to do our jobs and will continue to do our jobs. But I think it's kind of really evident, Speaker, that the party opposite and Doug Ford are panicked. They're panicked because they worried that they're going to -- people are going to find out that they are going to cut ohip plus, that they are going to cut expansion to OHIP Plus. That they are going to cut in significant investments to bring wait times down, that they're going tout supports for students through osap where 225,000 students are going to Colleges and universities without paying any tuition fees. They are worried about, speaker, that these important policies. Are making difference in people's lives, that they are going to cut those things and they don't want people to know about those things.

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

MPP Forster (NDP) to Minister Hunter (Advanced Education) re: York U. strike

>> MPP Forster: Thank you. My question is to the **Premier**. 3,000 York university aculty are still on strike taking a stand against insecure academic jobs and chronic underfunding of the university postsecondary system, even though the Liberal government is not. Tens of thousands of York university students now face a real threat of not graduating as they have planned they have planned their lives, careers and their futures which are now uncertain. I received a letter from a nursing student at York. She's been told by the university they need to make up all their practical hours in order to graate, which is impossible ashe strike drags on and they run the real risk of losing their placement. What does the **Premier** have to say to the students about why their graduation is now in jeopardy?

>> Minister Hunter: Speaker, you know this situation is certainly very challenging, and it's challenging particularly for the students at York university. Since the beginning of the strike, Speaker, I made it very, very clear that our priority is on the students, on getting both sides to come together to reach a fair resolution to both sides on this issue so that we can put our students at the forefront and bring them back to the learning that they're there to do. You know, Mr. Speaker, it's disappointing that an agreement has not yet been reached. The ministry of labour has provided support all the way through this process and this week appointed a commissioner to talk to both sides. A number of meetings have already been held, Mr. Speaker, and, you know, we need to get both sides talking and looking at a resolution.

>> MPP Forster: Back to the **Premier**. Another York student actually contacted me yesterday. He's a political science major and he's concerned that, for the second time in their four-year program adispute has threatened their ability to actually graduate. One side has been at the table and has been there for the last six weeks. The publicly funded administration at York university has not been at the table. The government appointed an

industrial relations commission to examine the outstanding issues in dispute. But having the lowest per-student funding I think in Canada is part of dispute in postsecondary education under this Liberal government. The **Premier** can still apply pressure to the publicly funded administration of York university to tell them to get back to the table. Two sides at the table to actually reach an agreement.

>> Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, our focus and our priority is on the students. York university has -- Speaker, York university has remained open and students are attending classes. So, you know, this is a very challenging situation. I've connected with both sides multiple times, Mr. Speaker. It's a very, very tough situation. We respect the Collective bargaining process and we are calling on both sides in this situation to find a compromise. Put the needs of the students first. Get back to the table. And resolve this issue that is fair and equitable to both sides.

MPP Hillier (PC) to Minister Naqvi (Attorney General) re: purported secrecy of certain tribunal rulings

>> MPP Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. To the **Premier**. Speaker, this **Premier** likes to talk the talk about fairness. But when it comes to actions, she certainly doesn't walk the walk. The latest example is this government argues against transparency in our tribunals. The **Premier** is using the -- Thank you. The latest example is this government arguing against transparency in our tribunals. The **Premier** is using the public purse to fight a court battle with the "Toronto Star," who will be challenging the secrecy of our tribunals that keep adjudicative decisions and records which are public property paid for by the taxpayer from the public. This legal battle is the epitome of an old and tired government. They are using our money to fight against releasing our records. Abusing the public purse in order to keep the tribunal hidden and secret behind closed doors breaks a fundamental tenet that justice must be seen to be done. Speaker, what is fair about that?

>> Minister Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. And thank the member for the question. I think, Speaker, as you heard the member reference a court case that is ongoing. It will be highly inappropriate for me to discuss and debate the merits of this -- of that case in the House. What I will say, Speaker, broadly that of course we very much value transparency and to make sure that that information is available as readily as possible. But, Speaker, one has to be also mindful of privacy and confidentiality as well. So when one is looking at records that may be before courts or tribunals, there are considerations around privacy and confidentiality. But as I said Minister, Speaker this matter is before the courts and we will leave it up to -- For determination.

>> MPP Hillier: Again to the **Premier**. It is this government who's arguing in the court. They're arguing that tribunals which adjudicate disputes, that impose heavy fines and punishments and sanctions and can revoke people's licences and accreditations and take away their livelihoods, they're arguing that these are not really courts. Tribunals such as human rights, the OLRB, the L.A. T., and dozens more have both the form and function of our courts, but none of the safeguards of impartiality, openness and due process. Speaker, the **Premier's** willingness to fight Canada's largest circulation newspaper in court, to hide the records and decisions of these public matters raise red flags. Speaker, it's time for this **Premier** -- Mandate tribunals make their records open and accessible and why is this **Premier** working to frustrate and distort the basic principles of an open court which are --

To our judicial system?

>> Minister Naqvi: Speaker, the member opposite very well knows that this is not a matter to be litigated in the House. This is a matter that is before the courts, and that is the most appropriate place for it to be heard. Speaker, I think as you have noted in the past and members know of the sub Judice rules that requires all entities not to engage in making comments about matters that are before the courts. And as the Attorney General, it is my responsibility to ensure that administration of justice in our province is independent of any partisan concerns. So therefore, Speaker, I'm not going to comment on the specifics of this case but to say that transparency and accountability's a very fundamental as a principle that the government holds very dear to us. But -- Mindful around confidentiality and privacy of information as well. Thank you.

MPP Hoggarth (Liberal) to Minister Thibeault (Energy) re: electricity trade with Quebec

>> MPP Hoggarth: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of energy. In 2014, Ontario signed a memorandum of understanding with Québec regarding electricity trade. In 2016, we announced an expanded seven-year deal that will help make electricity in Ontario more affordable, clean and reliable. Speaker, this deal was beneficial for both provinces because it helped ensure electricity supply for when it was needed most. In Québec they need electricity during the coldest winter days due that their use of electric heat. In Ontario we need it at the height of the summer. This M.O.U. Helped to ensure both our provinces had the supply we needed at those times. Just as importantly, the imports of cheap ydroelectricity from Québec will offset reliance on natural gas power plants, reducing Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions. By 1 million tonnes each year. Today the financial accountability officer released a report on this deal. Minister, can you please update us on the findings?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for that question and of course her tireless work for her constituents. I also want to thank, Mr. Speaker, the financial accountability officer for his report and the analysis of our electricity trade agreement with Québec. As the member noted, electricity demand peaks at different times in our province. That means there is the opportunity to coordinate our electricity systems in ways that are beneficial to both provinces and through the expanded electricity trade, in this deal our province is set to import up to 2 terawatts of clean hydroelectric power from Québec annually. That's enough power to power the entire city of Kitchener for a year, for example, Mr. Speaker. The report confirms that what I've always said about this agreement is strengthen system reliability and cost effectiveness for both provinces and the F.A.O. Report outlines that this deal will reduce system costs in our province by 38 million over the life of the deal. This our savings both to ratepayers across the province and I look forward to talking more about this in the supplementary Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Hoggarth: Thank you to the Minister for the response. An additional part of this deal is an agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Over the past 15 years, O has become a leader in the global fight against climate change. Just last year our electricity system was over 95% free of emissions that caused climate change. This is due to the nearly \$70 billion that has been invested to modernize the system since 2003, which included the elimination of dirty coal fired electricity generation. However we must continue to work hard on reducing our carbon footprint. Just two days ago governor Jerry Brown warned us what could happen if polluters are given a free pass. Something the official opposition wants to do. Speaker, through you to the Minister, could the Minister of energy please explain how this electricity trade agreement reduces

greenhouse gas emissions.

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right in pointing out that Ontario has become a leader in the fight against climate change. Just last week the province's environmental commissioner D that out be some --, Mr. Speaker .replacing coal fired electricity with renewable natural gas has cleaned our air, reduced greenhouse gas emissions and increased electrical grid capacity and resilience, Mr. Speaker. She also said that taking coal out of the electricity system dramatically reduced Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions and has improved air quality and public health. **And now the F.A.O.'s report confirms that the trade agreement will result in Q imports** continuing to replace 2.3 terawatt hours of natural gas generation each year and reduces G.H.G. Emissions by almost 1 million tonnes per year. Some real action on climate change, Mr. Speaker. Our government is continuing to ensure that our electricity is clean, reliable and affordable, Mr. Speaker .