

Summary of Question Period for Wednesday Sept. 27, 2017

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Date: Wed, 27 Sep 2017 12:02:33 -0400
Attachments: Q.P. SummarySept27-17v1.docx (16.2 kB); 20170927 - Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript.doc (122.37 kB)

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MPP Arnott (PC) to Minister Ballard (Climate Change and Environment) and Minister Sandals (Treasury Board) - re: informing the citizens of Ontario in an emergency

>> MPP Arnott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the **Premier**. Early Monday night, an email was sent by air quality Ontario, which is a branch of the ministry of the environment to some Hamilton residents just south of my riding advising them that hot and humid we there are conditions were creating elevated pollution levels. It said that a special air quality statement was in place due to the high levels of air pollution at that time. And that people needed to know that, quote, exposure to air pollution is particularly a concern for children, the elderly and those who have underlying medical conditions such as lung or heart disease, end quote. Mr. Speaker, we know that the government has set aside millions of dollars for their self-promoting self-serving pre-election ads. In contrast, will the **Premier** inform this House how much money was spent by air quality Ontario to inform Hamilton residents of this vitally urgent and potentially lifesaving information?

>> Minister Ballard: Thank you for that important question, which allows me, Speaker, to highlight some of the important work that our government and specifically my ministry has been doing for a number of years. Least, Speaker, among the least which is closing of the coal-burning plants, electrical generating coal burning plants across Ontario. You know, Speaker that, alone has saved the Ontario health care system an estimated \$4 billion, Mr. Speaker. So I can tell you, Speaker, that ongoing monitoring in Hamilton has shown that air quality has improved significantly since the mid 1990s, with a large reduction of pollutants in the air. And I'll tell you as well, Speaker, that Hamilton, Hamilton remains on the cutting edge of air pollution control research. And practical applications with regard to collaborative approaches, to continuing to improve air quality.

>> MPP Arnott: Mr. Speaker, again to the **Premier**, because that response in no way answered my question. The Minister neglected to point out that it was our environment Minister the Honourable Elizabeth Witmer who first announced -- lakeview generating station in mississauga. Again the email from air quality Ontario said and I quote - children, seniors and those with cardiovascular lung disease such as asthma are at risk. When the government does little other than sending out an email blast -- When the government does very little other than sending out an email blast to inform residents of this kind of potentially life threatening situation, yet they budget millions of dollars on pre-election ads, people rightly question their priorities. It appears the government is more

concerned about its own reelection than public health. How many people sit at home looking at government websites? There will be many thousands of seniors in Hamilton that don't use email and are not on a government email list. Will the Premier explain why the government failed to get this important information out to a broader audience?

>> Minister Sandals: I want to talk a little bit about advertising, because I really don't think that what you're talking about is advertising. You're talking about the process for having a formal ad, a formal ad on television or a formal ad on digital media, something that there's some production value for, which goes through a very extensive approval process, which would never allow you to respond to anything of an urgent nature in an urgent manner. So the processes that are talking about here have nothing to do with government advertising. You're conflating two topics that are totally unrelated, and the issue that we have here -- Ministry of environment is how in the modern world do you effectively instantly notify people? And one of the way is with your email distribution list.

MPP Vanthoff (NDP) to Minister Thibeault (Energy) re: government advertising

>> MPP Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Yesterday the Premier stated that the \$5.5 million hydro ad campaign, which was designed to boost Liberal polling numbers, was important, because people in the province needed to know the details about government programs that are in place. Can the Premier tell us, do these ads inform Ontarians under the Liberal hydro plan, a government program, their hydro bills will begin going up shortly after the next election?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and respond to the question, because it's important to state, Mr. Speaker, that Ontario remains the only jurisdiction in Canada to enact legislation that bans government paid partisan advertising. And we passed this historic legislation because we are against government using taxpayer dollars for partisan advertising, Mr. Speaker. I sat in the -- had the honour of sitting in the House of commons for six years when the leader of the opposition stood you and supported his government's action plan at the time and he would defend that, Mr. Speaker. And that's why, Mr. Speaker, that said, Mr. Speaker, the Ontario government has the responsibility to raise awareness and communicate information about programs and services that affect the people of Ontario. And this includes informing Ontarians of changes to their electricity bills so that they can use this information to plan for the future. It all adds director yans to a dedicated website where they can learn more about these changes, Mr. Speaker, and lower their bills even more.

>>MPP Vanthof: Once again to the Premier. Perhaps the government should think about informing Ontarians so they can plan for their future about all the details of the programs, because can the Premier tell us why the ads fail to mention that Ontarians will spend nearly two decades, a total of over \$21 billion more than they would without the Ontario hydro plan?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again when it comes to all of the programs that are being offered, the Ontario electricity support program is one of

those programs, Mr. Speaker. There are many that you can find on this website and this offers significant support to low-income households across the province and we've been doing everything we can to get enrollment even higher on this, Mr. Speaker. We've put inserts in people's bills. We've created the advertisements and more. You know, Mr. Speaker, the NDP's support for this program is less clear, Mr. Speaker. You know, when you're talking about advertisement, and you said it's a government responsibility to communicate information about programs and services that people need. Let's go through some of the largest advertising spend of 2015/2016, Mr. Speaker, our sexual violence and harassment campaign. Who will you help challenge existing attitudes and spark international discussion. We've communicated to Ontarians about -- Vaccines for children in Ontario. We do many, many things, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that we let Ontarians know about the programs and services available to them.