

Hansard: Brown to Premier (Sandals) on Public Accounts

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INSTANT HANSARD

>> **Patrick Brown:** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. According to the auditor general, this is the first time in the history of Ontario that the financial statements have been released without the auditor general's opinion. And I'm -- an unprecedented action in Ontario's history and incredibly disrespectful to the auditor general and the people of Ontario. But why, why would the release without the a.g.'s opinion? That's the big question. Was it because she discovered the government has an \$11 billion hole in their budget? Mr. Speaker .. that includes \$1.5 billion deficit this year. That's a lot of money. How will the government fill this hole? Is it going to be through new taxes? Higher hydro rates? New fees or will the Liberals just cut services?

>> **Premier Wynne:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by saying jays go -- blue days -- go, Jays, go. Blue Jays. Mr. Speaker, we were very clear yesterday that we have accepted, we have accepted the auditor general's numbers for this year. We released the documents despite the divergence in accounting opinions specific to two pension funds between treasury board officials and the auditor as part of our commitment to openness and transparency, because it was past the date, Mr. Speaker, when that information was to be in the public. In the meantime, we will be consulting with experts on how our pension assets should be accounted for moving forward. Officials will be engaging. Expert accounting community to support a full understanding of how that --

>> **Patrick Brown:** Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. Every time it looks like the Liberals are hiding something, it becomes just a matter of time until they get caught. First they tried to hide the cost of the gas plant scandal. We later found out that it cost over \$1 billion. Then the financial accountability officer caught the Liberals when they were supposed to use the funds from the fire sale of Hydro One for transportation, and then it goes to the deficit. And now the auditor general caught them trying to hide an \$11 billion hole in the budget. Mr. Speaker, I know our grade 6 students are failing in math but I at least thought the government knew how to count. I expected better from this government. So my question is directly to the Premier, why has the auditor general given your government a failing grade on public accounts? Directly to the Premier.

>> **Minister Sandals:** Yes. Thank you very much, and I'm very pleased to report that using the

numbers that were suggested by the auditor general, what we really showed yesterday was that in fact we have beat our deficit target, Speaker, for the seventh year. I consider that very important because it shows what is happening with the province's books and with the province's fiscal performance is in fact we are managing our economy prudently and we are on target to reach our goal of balancing the budget in '17/18. We in fact showed that we had a projection originally of an 8.5 billion deficit. We now have a 5 billion deficit last year. We beat our projection, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. Sometimes I wonder what fantasy world this government is living in. When it comes to believing this government or the auditor general, I'm with the auditor general. This is the auditor general saying that there is an \$11 billion hole in the budget and there is now an additional \$1.5 billion away from balancing the budget. Why this government continues to ignore and disrespect the auditor general is beyond me. On the flipside you have the government saying that everything is fine, that their numbers add up. The auditor general is saying fairly clearly that --So, Mr. Speaker, instead of ignoring the auditor general, how is this government going to make up the \$1.5 billion in their current budget? And additionally, Mr. Speaker, how does this government reconcile the fact that they're the first government in Ontario's history to release public accounts without the auditor general's opinion? It's beyond me.

>> Minister Sandals: Thank you. I'll go over this one more time calmly. When we tabled our budget in 2015, we projected that the '15 --16 year would result in a deficit of 8.5 billion. When we tabled our budget, the current-year budget last spring, 2016, we said the interim projection for a deficit would be 5.5 billion, and what did we actually achieve using the auditor general's numbers? We achieved a deficit of 5 billion. In other words, we beat the budget targets using the auditor general's numbers by \$3.5 billion. The member from Kitchener-conestoga, come to order. You do have a wrap-up sentence if you want. Yes, thank you. So, to me, it is good news that "A" we got the financial information. Out to the public and "B" that we've beaten our deficit target.

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