

Summary of Question Period for Monday May 29, 2017

From: "Flowers, Robert (TBS)" <robert.flowers@ontario.ca>
Date: Mon, 29 May 2017 12:03:05 -0400
Attachments: Q.P. SummaryMay29-17.docx (14.98 kB); 20170529 - Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript.doc (125.44 kB)

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

MPP Kiwala (LIB) to Minister Sandals re: Ontario Economic Growth

>>MPP Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the president of the treasury board. Our government committed to balancing the budget in 2017/2018, and we delivered that balanced budget, Speaker. In 2009, when the recession hit, we said that our government would take a fair and balanced approach that focused on growing the economy and delivering the best possible value for every single dollar spent. For eight years in a row our government beat deficit targets, while improving the services that mattered most to Ontarians. We created over 700,000 jobs since the recession, and now the unemployment rate has dropped to 5.8%. That's the lowest unemployment rate in 16 years, Mr. Speaker. Canada's big banks are forecasting that Ontario will lead -- let me repeat, will lead the country in economic growth this year. While economic success - across all sectors including manufacturing, real estate, finance and technology.

>>Minister Sandals: Well, thank you very much, Speaker. And thank you to the member for Kingston and the islands. Balance the budget we've been very diligently managing the growth in program spending. Over the past four years, we've held the annual growth in spending to 1.4%, while continuing to invest in priority programs and services like health care and education. You know, Speaker, in fiscal 2014/15 treasury board identified \$250 million in efficiencies and reduced administrative overhead without affecting frontline services. In fiscal 2015/16 we identified a number of major initiatives to modernize public services and we met our \$500 million savings target. And we continue to -- Realize savings by undergoing changes supported by the establishment of our centre of excellence for evidence-based decision making.

>>MPP Kiwala: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The P.C.s voted against our budget. Instead of investing in Ontarians the P.C.s are desperately trying to not talk about our recent budget and all the important things that we're doing. All the important investments that we're making for Ontarians in their everyday lives. They keep repeating claims that our budget isn't balanced, flying in the face of facts. We're helping seniors cover the cost of public transit by introducing Ontario public tax credit for seniors. We're increasing support for the most vulnerable by investing \$480 million more in the program. And we're launching a basic income pilot and see if there's a better way to provide income security for people. The P.C.S vote against every single one of these items. Minister, can you please tell us more about what this program -- what this budget does for Ontarians?

>>Minister Sandals: Thank you, Speaker. It was indeed very disappointing to see the P.C.s vote against the budget. Because we're making medicine free for children and youth 24 and under so that no child in this province faces financial Barriers to getting healthy. We're lowering electricity bills on average by 25% to make people's electricity bills fairer. Through the fair housing plan, we're making it easier to buy and rent a home. We're providing free tuition for 210,000 low and middle income students. We're creating 100,000 more affordable quality child care spaces to help families in their everyday lives. So, Speaker, I ask the members opposite, which of these initiatives do you not support? Which ones would you not invest in? Which ones would you cut?

MPP Brown (PC) to the Premier re: government advertising

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Another day, another Liberal partisan advertisement. This time it was the recent budget add. It's becoming quite repetitive around here these days. First the Liberals spend millions of taxpayer dollars on advertising. Second the auditor general says the ads are clearly partisan. Third the Liberals skew some nonsense about Ontario prohibiting partisan advertising. Rinse and repeat it is the same line.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier just come clean to the people of Ontario and admit these ads are wrong? They are partisan. The Premier's using taxpayer dollars to benefit the Ontario Liberal party. Do the right thing. Cancel these ads.

>> Premier Wynne: Again, Mr. Speaker, I would say that, as the leader of the opposition knows, Ontario's the only province in the country that has advertising restrictions, Mr. Speaker, that are legislated. Mr. Speaker, we've made it very clear that partisan advertising is not allowed. Mr. Speaker, the benchmark that's used for partisan advertising is what that party did when it was in office, Mr. Speaker. It's quite clear, it's quite clear that because of our legislation, we have moved very far away from that partisan advertising. But, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to be in northeast Ontario, northeastern Ontario over the last week, and one stop that I made in Sudbury was at a unit in a hospital called neokids. And I had the opportunity to meet with families there, Mr. Speaker, who have kids who are chronically ill or they have very serious illness, Mr. Speaker, and many of them need regular medication every day every month, Mr. Speaker. They were very happy to know that ohip plus pharmacare is starting on January 1st, 2018.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker again to the Premier and back to the actual question. From wawa to petawawa, from Parry Sound to Owen Sound, to kapuskasing to Nipissing, what do we have in common? These are towns that are opposition-held ridings, and as reported a Q.P. Briefing I quote the auditor general's office noted this could suggest that these areas were targeted for that reason. And I agree with the auditor general. Without a doubt the Liberal government is campaigning using taxpayer dollars in opposition ridings. It's unethical. It should be illegal and, Mr. Speaker, I will ask the Premier again, will the Premier do the right thing and stop abusing taxpayer dollars for the sole purpose of benefitting the Liberal party?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely understand why the leader of the opposition does not want us to talk about our budget. I absolutely understand that. He does not want -- especially, Mr. Speaker, especially -
- Especially given what he said earlier today, Mr. Speaker, is that his strategy would be to stop investing in Ontario. So he doesn't want us to talk about the 100,000 child care spaces that we'll create, Mr. Speaker. He doesn't want us to talk about free tuition because that's an investment in the people and young people of this province. He doesn't want us to talk about ohip plus, Mr. Speaker, because that's investment of the children and the youth of this province who need medication, and it's an investment in their families to allow them to make end meet and support their children. He doesn't want us to talk about any of that, Mr. Speaker. Because his strategy is just to stop investing in the people of this province.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. The word investing is all of a sudden code word for what is acceptable to use taxpayer dollars. Investing in partisan Liberal ads? You call that investment? People right now in Ontario are struggling to get by. They can't pay their hydro bills and yet you've got a government wasting millions on partisan ads. This isn't the opposition party's say. This is the auditor general, the independent legislative oversight saying this is wrong. This is unethical. We get the same spin, the same talking points. Abusing taxpayer dollars is not investing. It is wrong. When will this Liberal government learn? Stop abusing taxpayer dollars. Do what's right and cull these ads.

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I say to the leader of the opposition once again he knows full well that there's only one province in this country that has legislation that forbids partisan advertising that has standard, Mr. Speaker, and that is Ontario, and we are the government that's moved on that, Mr. Speaker. But I will go back to what the leader of the opposition does not want to see us talking about. He does not, Mr. Speaker, want us to talk about the capital investments that we are making in hospitals. He does not want us to talk about the fact that, in Moose Factory, there is a hospital that was built in 1950, Mr. Speaker. And he doesn't want us to talk about the fact that we're going to rebuild that hospital. We're going to replace that hospital, Mr. Speaker. He doesn't want us to talk about that because that's an investment in the province. It's an investment in the people of Moose Factory and the James Bay coast. He also doesn't want us to talk about the fact that we are put a 2% max -- minimum -- investment in every operating budget in the hospitals in this province and that, Mr. Speaker, is an investment in people in every corner of Ontario.

MPP Horwath (NDP) to the Premier and Minister Thibeault (Energy) re: government advertising

>> Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question's for the Premier. The Premier recently put forward a new law that will force all electricity companies to include her political messaging with hydro bills right up until the next election. In fact her regulation contains the exact messaging that she plans to force the companies to use. How can this Premier justify the shameless self promotion at the expense of everyday families in Ontario?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of energy is going to want to speak to the details of this. Mr. Speaker, I am quite sure that even the leader of the third party would like to see everyone who's eligible receive the reduction that they are -- that they're eligible for, that they're entitled to. That they're entitled to. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the leader of the third party knows, because she's been talking about it in this legislature for weeks, Mr. Speaker, she knows that people need that relief on their hydro bills. She knows, Mr. Speaker, people need that 25% reduction. She knows, Mr. Speaker, that, in rural and remote communities, that people need even more than that because distribution charges are so high. So, Mr. Speaker, I know that the leader of the third party supports a reduction, Mr. Speaker, and the Minister of energy will speak to the details in the bill.

>> Andrea Horwath: People are going to get it regardless of partisan advertising in their bills or not. So why is the Premier doing that? Electricity companies to do the Premier's dirty work by trying to sell the people of Ontario on her \$45 billion hydro borrowing scheme. This is a new low, Speaker, in political manipulation at the expense of Ontario families, who are already struggling to just keep up with their skyrocketing bills, Speaker. Is this Premier so desperate to save her political skin that she is going to force families to pay for her own partisan advertising?

>> Minister Thibeault : Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased to rise and talk about our fair hydro plan, because I find it interesting from the questioning from the leader of the third party. Just last week, Mr. Speaker, when I was in Sault Ste. Marie and when I spoke with Steve and Lucy, who own the m&ms and the other country style doughnuts that the leader of the opposition spoke to, I thought it very interesting that they didn't know about the fair hydro plan. They didn't know about the benefits that they were going to be getting when the fair hydro plan passes, Mr. Speaker. But it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the leader of the third party chose not to tell them about the plan. She chose not to tell them about all of the things that will be coming, Mr. Speaker. So you know what we're doing, Mr. Speaker? We're going to ensure that we -- I know, Mr. Speaker, that we have one party that doesn't have a plan. We have a new party. We'd like to hear what that new party will have to say. And then from the third party, Mr. Speaker, they don't even talk about their plan any more. We will ensure. That we talk about our plan so everybody in this province knows that they'll be getting 25% off before summer.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, everybody in Ontario will be shocked when they see their bill. They'll be shocked to learn that they're now paying for the Liberals' advertising to be delivered right to their doorstep. By law, Speaker, because the Liberals are putting it in legislation, in regulation. To put the advertising for that party into people's bills. People expected so much better from this Premier. But time and time again, they have been let down. Instead of forcing electricity companies to advertise her borrowing scheme, had the Liberal Premier instead put her energy into coming up with a plan that helps people instead of helping her political party and herself?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. 800,000 families in this province will see a 40 to 50% reduction thank you to the Premier and this government bringing forward legislation, Mr. Speaker, that will help families. Every single House hold in this province, Mr. Speaker. 500,000 small businesses and farms. They will receive a 25% reduction on average, Mr. Speaker, come summer when we can get this legislation passed. But what really is bothersome, Mr. Speaker, is last week the

NDP Confirmed that they would repeal the fair hydro plan. The admission courtesy of the candidate in Sault Ste. Marie and that comes as a shock to everyone. We talk about the need to help families with the cost of electricity. But when we could have supported the plan to cut bills by 25% for those low incomes between 40 and 50? You know what they said, Mr. Speaker ? As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, you know what they said, Mr. Speaker ? No.

MPP Brown (PC) to the Premier re: hydro rate reduction

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The financial accountability officer's report on the Liberals' unfair hydro scheme wasn't shocking to the opposition. We have been saying all along that simply the boring plan that kicks the can down the road. At the lowest estimate, this plan will cost taxpayers \$21 billion, and at the highest, a staggering \$93 billion. This plan is not about sharing cost. It's about saving seats. Not only will this cost the next generation billions of dollars, but the generation after that, too. This is a short-sighted reelection scheme. Mr. Speaker, is this unfair hydro scheme really about burdening Ontario with another \$93 billion of debt? Or is it about helping the Liberal party?

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our fair hydro plan is about helping people in this province. It's about helping mom-and-pop businesses on main streets, Mr. Speaker, and it's about helping farms, farmers, Mr. Speaker. It's about people who need relief on their electricity bill, getting that relief. Mr. Speaker, the member for Renfrew- Nipissing, in his- usual thoughtful way, is heckling about the last 14 years. Mr. Speaker, over the last 14 years we've invested in the electricity system in this province so that we have a clean renewable system, Mr. Speaker, that has been degraded by the very party that the member opposite is a member of. And, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly government after government have not made the investments that needed to be made. So electricity prices were kept artificially low, Mr. Speaker. The system was degraded. We had to make these investments and Mr. Speaker -- We're spreading the cost of those investments over a longer period of time. That's fair today and it's fair tomorrow, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier. The Premier said she was investing in the electricity system over the last 14 years. Well, stop investing because, under your watch, you've raised hydro rates 400%. They've broken hydro in Ontario. Every time -- they've made it worse. So I've got a simple -- Mr. Speaker, I have a simple, simple multiple-choice question for the Premier. How many billions of taxpayer dollars is the Premier willing to spend on this hydro scheme for her reelection campaign? "A" 21 billion. B" 45 billion, or "C" 93 billion? Which is it, "A," "B" or "C"? How much taxpayer dollars are you going to waste for the self --

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very clear that the -- Very clear that the leader of the opposition has a very different philosophy of how to grow this province and make it strong, Mr. Speaker. He would stop investing apparently in the new hospital -- He would stop investing in the transit that makes bracebridge able to have a bus -- Investing in small-town infrastructure like bracebridge. If he would stop investing in a clean, renewable electricity grid, Mr. Speaker, and he would stop investing in the education and the health care resources that are allowing this province to thrive. He would stop investing, Mr. Speaker. That's

not a plan. That's -- THA is a strategy -- That is a strategy for undermining the growth of this province. We're not going to go there, Mr. Speaker.

>> Patrick Brown: To the Premier. The Premier's absolutely correct for once. I will stop investing in bad Liberal contracts. According to the auditor general, we overpaid \$9.2 billion. That's our investment. Overpaid by 9.2 billion? The 30 companies that got the contracts, surprise, surprise, donated \$1.3 million to the Ontario Liberal party. That's the investment they're proud of? They have supported the Liberal party's bank account, not Ontario ratepayers. And everyone sees it. Everyone in the province sees just read the "Globe and mail" this weekend. In the "Globe and mail," I quote -- unless you're planning on living off the grid in Algonquin park or moving out of the province by 2028, you will be materially worse off under this scheme than had the Liberals just left bad enough alone. This plan is going to hurt Ontario. Why won't the Premier just do the right thing and admit they have broken hydro in Ontario? Stop trying to make it worse.

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we've invested in the electricity system in this province. It is clean, its renewable and it is reliable, Mr. Speaker. People need relief on their electricity bills because of the investments that have been made in order to get us there, and we're spreading the cost of those investments over a longer period of time. And happy, Mr. Speaker, to talk to the next generation about that, that they are going to be able to access an asset that we have invested and we fixed, Mr. Speaker, because previous governments were not able to or not willing to. Mr. Speaker, the investments that we have made in this province, let's look at what those investments have LED to. Ontario's created almost 700,000 new jobs since the recession, almost 300,000 since I became Premier, Mr. Speaker. Ontario's economic growth has LED all G-7 nations for the past three years. Our unemployment rate has dropped to 5.8%, Mr. Speaker. Its lowest level in 16 years. That's what investment in the province has been, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Fedeli (PC) to Minister Sousa (Finance) re: recent FAO report

>>MPP Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. It's not just the financial accountability officers who weighed in on the government's hydro scheme. The auditor general attended the hydro committee hearings last week and exposed yet another secret. The government plans on borrowing all these billions and not declaring it on their books. Well, the Liberals got caught again. The auditor said, quote -- for obvious reasons, this is not allowed under Canadian public sector accounting standards. They tried to bury all these billions and not have the cost of their scheme show up anywhere. Did they think they were not going to get caught, Speaker? I ask the Premier why does it always take the auditor general, the financial accountability officer or the OPP for the people of Ontario to get to the truth?

>>Minister Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. Let's remind everyone in this House that that process that's being proposed is being endorsed by Pricewaterhouse, by a number of accounting professionals in the system. It's being enabled to protect the interest of ratepayers and consumers, Mr. Speaker. It's enabling them to benefit from lower costs today and taking an asset that's

registered and enabling it to be valued over a longer period of time and that is what's being established. It's being established to reduce rates today and enable us to provide for a good system and clean reliable system throughout the future, Mr. Speaker. And the member opposite may oppose that. He may wish not to provide for a lowering of rates. He may decide that it's not appropriate for an asset to be registered and extended over a period of time, but professionals in the accounting system has decided that that is appropriate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Fedeli: That's not what the auditor general decided. Two weeks ago we asked the government why they co-opted O.P.G. as the financing arm of this financing scheme. We asked if it's because the billions this hide rode scheme will add to O.P.G.'s debt won't show up on the province's books. Despite all their denials, the auditor general has confirmed that's exactly what this government was planning. They plan to spend billions now, bury that money on O.P.G.'s books and not have the province account for any of this debt. But the auditor general says no way. They got caught yet again. I ask the Premier, now that your scheme has been revealed, will you drop this charade with O.P.G. And properly account for these billions on the province's books?

>>Minister Sousa: So, Mr. Speaker, again I remind the member opposite that the process that's been delivered here has been done in consultations with numerous experts, over 1 jurisdictions in north America have provided and utilizing similar accounting practice within the system. We have been working with O.P.G., who by the way has the next expertise in assisting with the financing. They currently manage over \$18 billion in nuclear funds that can be used in infrastructure and proceed in this field to help administer long-term financing, Mr. Speaker. This is not a novel approach. This has been done in other jurisdictionsment duke energy in North Carolina, Long Island lighting. We are moving forward to help consumers to help our people in Ontario, to help our businesses to be more competitive. The member opposite obviously don't have a plan. They don't want to invest. They've made that clear and now they're going to vote down something that's going to help the people of Ontario and our businesses, and that, Mr. Speaker, is a shame.

MPP Tabuns (NDP) to the Premier and Minister Thibeault (Energy) re: the recent FAO report

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. To the Premier. Last week the financial accountability officer confirmed what Ontarians already knew. The Premier's wrong-headed hydro borrowing scheme will end up costing families and businesses more in the long run. The borrowing scheme will add nearly \$45 billion to Ontario hydro bills after a few years of temporary relief. In light of this confirmation, now there can be no doubt about the effect of this politically motivated scheme. Does the Premier plan to present Ontarians with a better option?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We work very closely with the financial accountability officer to provide information and analysis on our proved fair hydro plan and we welcome his final report, Mr. Speaker. The F.A.O. report confirms the foundation of the fair hydro plan, a cut in electricity rates by 25% on average for all residential consumers and as many as a half a million

small businesses and farms, Mr. Speaker. And what's more rate increases will be held to the rate of inflation for four years while low-income Ontarians and those living in eligible rural and northern communities would see savings of up to 40 to 50%. And it's important to remember, Mr. Speaker, that the F.A.O.'s projection of electricity costs reflect the point-in-time estimate that demonstrates how we can ensure greater affordability and fairness in the shorter term and medium term. For the long term we are focused on our long-term energy plan which will lay out our plan to continue to keep costs down. Families in the province, Mr. Speaker, have asked for real immediate relief on their electricity bills. And that's why we are working to deliver the largest rate reduction in Ontario's history if this legislation is passed, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Tabuns: Speaker, again to the Premier. The F.A.O. is a nonpartisan, independent officer of the legislature whose sole job is to protect the people of Ontario. He told us, without doubt, that Ontario families and businesses will be worse off in ten years under the Premier's hydro scheme than they would be if there was no intervention at all. How can the Premier just ignore the F.A.O. And forge ahead when she knows, knows that her plan will end up doing more damage than good?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Speaker. Again a 25% reduction in the short term, holding the cost to inflation for the next four years and bringing forward the long-term energy plan will continue to keep the rates as low as possible for families, small businesses and farms right across our great province, Mr. Speaker. And as mentioned it's important to remember the f.a.o.'s projection of electricity costs. It reflects a point in time that estimates and demonstrates how we can ensure greater fairness and affordability in the short and the medium term, Mr. Speaker. The F.A.O. Report confirmed the foundation of the fair hydro plan, that we will be reducing rates by 25% on average for families, small businesses and farms right across our province, Mr. Speaker. And for those that live in rural and northern parts of our province. They will see a 40 to 50% reduction thanks to us and the fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker. The opposition parties are voting against that.