

Summary of Question Period for Thursday Dec. 07, 2017

From: "Flowers, Robert (TBS)" <robert.flowers@ontario.ca>
Date: Thu, 07 Dec 2017 11:52:57 -0500
Attachments: Q.P.SummaryDec07-17.docx (18.12 kB); 20171207 - Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript.doc (119.81 kB)

Please see the select or full summary of today's Question Period

MPP Jones (PC) to Minister Sandals and Auditor General report - Advertising

>> MPP Jones: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Deputy Premier. The auditor general has reported that the Wynne Liberals have spent \$17.4 million on government advertising. The auditor says that the primary goal of these ads were to, quote, foster a positive impression of the government parties. These include a \$3 million infrastructure campaign which the auditor said were self-congratulatory and aimed at ensuring the government gets credit for its potential future spending plans. \$17.4 million is a 33% jump in advertising in a single year. Are Ontarians to take it as a coincidence that the government has increased this advertising budget by 33% the year before an election?

>> Minister Sandals: Yes, thank you very much and I'm very pleased to respond to the question and to the report from the auditor general. And I'd like to begin by noting that of course we are and continue to be the only province in Canada that actually has government advertising legislation. I also want to talk a little bit about the numbers, because it is true that the numbers increased from last year's estimate. But that's because, primarily because that there was -- Primarily because money that had previously been in ministry advertising lines were consolidated into the central advertising line. So when you actually compare apples to apples. Then you find out that in fact there was only a \$6 million increase in the advertising budget and I would be happy to explain that.

>> MPP Jones: She needs to explain it to the auditor. The government continues to claim that they are complying with the legislation but they neglect to mention that they were the ones who watered down the legislation, and it actually weakens the auditor general's oversight. The A.G. Report shows that there is a massive loophole in government legislation. The loophole has allowed the government to spend nearly \$5 million on digital ads, social media, with zero approval needed from the auditor general. That is why under the people's guarantee Patrick Brown and the P.C. Government will return the auditor general's oversight -- Will you commit to doing the same?

>> Minister Sandals: So if we could just sort out some accurate information about the legislation, the original legislation which they support did not give the -- Did not give the auditor the authority to review. The legislation which does give the auditor the authority to review digital advertising is our revised legislation which currently exists. So to go back

to what I was saying before, it is true that there is a \$6 million increase in the bulk media buy line this year. That is related to the fact that we are translating into more languages. It is related to the fact that we insisted all government advertising be compliant with the Ontario disabilities act. And that in fact the cost of digital advertising has gone up. Not because so much the volume has gone up, but just that the cost of placing an ad in digital media has gone up because of the more --

MPP Fife (NDP) to Minister Sandals re: government advertising

>> MPP Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the acting **Premier**. Liberal government advertising has hit a 10-year high and I'm sure it's coincidental how its advertising has peaked in an election year. Ontario's auditor has reported that 30% of those ads are what she would call partisan ads but because of the legislative changes made by the Liberal government, the auditor general now has no choice but to approve those partisan ads. That means public dollars are being used to promote this Liberal government and this Liberal party. This is just one of the reasons, Mr. Speaker, why the people of this province no longer trust this government. Will the government stop running partisan ads today?

>> Minister Sandals: Yes. Thank you very much. As I noted earlier, Speaker, Ontario does remain the only province in Canada that actually has rules around government advertising. So that in fact when we look at government advertising, we have a definition of partisan advertising which says that you can't side -- advertise a party. You can't have political figures from Cabinet, that in fact there are very tight rules about what is and is not allowed. But people keep referring back to we should go back to the old legislation. And quite frankly the things people are concerned about actually would have been perfectly acceptable under the old legislation. Let me remind you what the old legislation said. It said that you -- it was ok to inform people about government programs, policies and services.

>> MPP Fife: Again to the acting **Premier**. I do not understand, nor do people of this province, understand how you can justify defending this program. It is indefensible. Public advertising should serve the public good, not help a desperate government hold onto seats. It wasn't just that the **Premier** was using public dollars to promote their hydro scheme or add to programs that didn't actually exist, but they actually used public dollars to try and target opposition MPP S. Ontarians have every reason to feel let down by this **Premier** and by this government. Will the acting **Premier** stop these advertising campaigns today or is she going to keep using public dollars for partisan Liberal ads?

>> Minister Sandals: As I say, by the old standards, which they claim are the correct standards, it would inform people about government programs, policies and services. That's exactly what the fair hydro ads did or you could -- it was ok if you were talking about changing social behaviour in the public interest. Who would you help? Exactly that. Climate change. Informing people about the reality of climate change. Exactly about talking to people about social policy. These ads are exactly on target under the old rules and the new rules. And you know what, Speaker? I've heard lots of complaints from members opposite about how we don't spend enough money advertising in small-town media. We do advertise in small town media. What do they do? They complain.

