

Summary of Question Period for Thursday October 19, 2017

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

MPP Brown (PC) to Minister Thibeault (Energy) and possibly missing emails

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the **Premier**. According to the scathing auditor general's report, the Minister -- ministry of energy signed a contract with the retainer of \$500,000 to receive help from a law firm to provide services and to compile emails before providing them to us. At the same time they completed the special report. The ministry has still not provided us with all the emails from the auditor general's office. Those emails were requested on May 31st, 2017. I can appreciate the frustration of the auditor general. Mr. Speaker, **Premier** authorize or instruct the Minister of energy to block or delay the release of those emails, or did the Minister obstruct the auditor general on his own decision?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government remains committed to being open and transparent and continues to co-operate with the office of the auditor general. For example, Mr. Speaker, the independent electricity system operator has so far provided 1,200 records to the auditor general. Ontario power generation has provided hundreds of records, Mr. Speaker. The Ontario financing authority has provided 3,242 records. Treasury board, thousands every records. And as of yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I explained that, as of October 13th, the ministry has provided 13,212 records to the office of the auditor general. In this process, Mr. Speaker, and throughout our everyday operations, we're adhering to all document retention standards. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the ministry is continuing to release additional information to the auditor general. In fact committed to providing all additional records to the auditor by November 1st. The ministry has been regularly providing the auditor general's office with additional documents each week and will continue.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the **Premier**. The question was who ordered the obstruction? Was it the **Premier's** office or was it the Minister of energy's own decision? The Minister said that he released 13,000 emails to the auditor general. However he still went out and got some high-priced help for this apparent obstruction. In fact the half a million dollars consulting firm and his office originally identified some 2 million emails. That means he released less than 1%. That's actually .65% of the identified emails. We released 1% of our emails to the auditor general. That's not good enough, Mr. Speaker. Less than 1%. That's not transparent. That's a government that's engaged in obstruction. So, Mr. Speaker, my question is very straightforward to the **Premier** herself. Will the

Premier release the other 99% of the emails and –to the auditor general.

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again we had 80 custodians identified capturing 40 phrases, Mr. Speaker, that provided over 2 million emails. None of those -- not all of those emails, Mr. Speaker, applied to this actual document and to this request, Mr. Speaker. But really, when we're looking at what was being done with the fair hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, it was giving families what they had asked for, real and immediate relief on their electricity bills, and that's what we delivered, Mr. Speaker. We made a policy choice to ensure that we continue to have a clean, reliable and affordable --Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, we made the policy choice to ensure that we continue to have a clean, reliable and affordable electricity system. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, we made the policy choice to ensure that we continue to have a clean, reliable and affordable electricity system. For ratepayers of today and ratepayers of tomorrow.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, for a third time, directly to the **Premier**. The half-a-million-dollar consultants have had since May 31st to get these emails to the auditor general. That's 141 days and counting. I'm sure Peter Faist works his email magic a lot quicker than that and it only costs \$10,000. Mr. Speaker, I agree with the auditor general. This is an offensive obstruction of the rights of the auditor general, and every single member of this legislature. Mr. Speaker -- One more day is one too many. So my question, Mr. Speaker, directly to the **Premier** -- I hope that she will answer this herself rather than passing the buck. Will she have those emails boxed up and sent over to the auditor general before another one of her Liberal cronies has a chance to double delete them? Exposure. Will she release the other 99% of emails on this very serious matter?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Talking about days, we know it's almost 365 days that they've said that they would release a plan on what they would do with the electricity sector, Mr. Speaker, and they have done nothing. Let's look at what we have done, Mr. Speaker. We've lowered electricity bills by 25% for all residential customers and as many as a half a million small businesses and farms, and I know the parties opposite have yet to even present a credible plan. Families in this province asked for real and immediate relief and that's what we've delivered, Mr. Speaker. The fair hydro plan is providing that 25% reduction to all residential ratepayers and guarantees that we're going to keep the costs will not rise beyond the rate of inflation for the next four years. Mr. Speaker, electricity rates had risen too much too fast, and as a result of this investments that we've made in our electricity system, which have become unreliable. With Brownouts and blackouts, the fair hydro plan makes sure, with the investments that we made, that we've made it clean, reliable and affordable, Mr. Speaker. With Brownouts and blackouts, the fair hydro plan makes sure, with the investments that we made, that we've made it clean, reliable and affordable, Mr. Speaker .

Second question on similar topic

>>MPP Smith: My question this morning is for the Premier, Speaker. The Premier rode in on a white horse. She touted her open government. She loudly exclaimed that let's do things differently. And then her speech from the throne, quote, the plan to open up government -- With increased transparency and more accountability. And ever since then they -- Speaker, she made all these promises. Ever since then, she's respected the independent officers of the legislature. She's thrown open the books for the independent

officers to look at. She's followed the rules and she's respected the law. Kidding. She hasn't done any of that. She's actually made up her own rules. She's made up her own rules. She's actually removed oversight from the officers of the legislature. Mr. Speaker, what happened to this Premier saying she was going to do things differently?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know when my Honourable friend rises and talks about all of the great things that our Premier continues to do, he was starting off on the right path, Mr. Speaker. But the only party that is seen as a party that's kidding with the people of Ontario is the party opposite, Mr. Speaker. That party will do one thing and then say another every single week, Mr. Speaker. They talk about bringing forward a plan on electricity and then say oh, wait. No, that will come next week. No, wait. That will come next month. Now it's going to happen in some magical weekend in November. But we know, Mr. Speaker, they have no plan. They have no idea on what to do to help the people of Ontario. Just for example, Mr. Speaker, not even when it comes to electricity. Let's talk about minimum wage. First in the first reading, Mr. Speaker, they vote in favour of helping all low-income people in this province. Then when it came to voting on the bill yesterday, Mr. Speaker, where were they? Nowhere Mr. Speaker .

>>MPP Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's really a shame that the Premier won't actually answer these questions about her lack of openness and transparency that she promised. We're talking about a brand-new \$4 billion scandal here on this so-called fair hydro plan. This is going to cost billions of dollars, taxpayers and electricity customers billions. It's starting to look like an episode of the Simpsons over there. Where are they going to find this \$4 billion? A case of duff's beer or Lisa's saxophone or grandpa Simpson's drawer? Who's running the show over there? Is it Homer Simpson or is it Ed Clark? We have the members of the eastern Ontario warden's caucus who are here. They're looking for much needed infrastructure dollars. How far would this \$4 billion go to answering the needs in our local communities? But it's not going there, Mr. Speaker. When will the Premier just stand up and she cease made an enormous mistake on this scheme? Minister Thibeault:: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now I know, Mr. Speaker, that the fair hydro plan is reducing everyone in this province their bills by 25%, Mr. Speaker. That's something that we should all be proud of because we recognize that we spent money in infrastructure rebuilding this system. \$70 billion, Mr. Speaker. But when you want to talk about infrastructure bills, I know that the Minister of infrastructure, even the Minister of transportation can talk over and over again, Mr. Speaker, about all the infrastructure that we're building right across the province. But let me start talking a little bit about the infrastructure. \$13.5 billion in the gtha go regional express rail. It's going to quadruple the number of weekly trips to 6,000. 5.3 billion Eglinton crosstown L.R.T. \$1 billion in the ring of fire tripling the Ontario community infrastructure fund to \$300 million. \$1.4 billion in the Hurontario L.R.T.. 1 billion in Ottawa's L.R.T. 43 million in the Waterloo regional transit hub and I haven't even started on northern Ontario.

>>MPP Smith: Thanks, Speaker. It's amazing to me that the Premier doesn't want to answer these questions, because we're talking about a lack of openness and transparency that she promised here, and this scandal is costing us \$4 billion. And they haven't released all of the documents. They haven't released the emails. In all seriousness, the fact that they haven't released all of the emails given what happened

during the gas plant scandal, Speaker, is absurd much it's an egregious breach of trust by this government. They stonewalled an F.O.I. Saying no records exist and now they play the waiting game trying to outlast the public's right to see the government's backroom dealings. Speaker, I'll provide the boxes. All they have to do is take those emails, put them in the boxes. As a matter of fact, I still have the boxes from the gas plant scandal. I'll send those boxes over and they can put the emails in those boxes. Just turn over the boxes and do the right thing

>>Minister Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, so let's be clear on one thing, Mr. Speaker. All of the boxes that they have on that side are usually filled with something else, Mr. Speaker, and it's not something that we really want to smell. But the one thing I can talk about here, Mr. Speaker, is that we've made sure -- we've made sure that we've put 80 custodians, 40 access words, Mr. Speaker, and we have come up with 2 million documents. Those 2 million documents were went through by our law firm and they identified 145,000 emails. Those 145,000 emails, Mr. Speaker, are now being gone through by the ministry of energy, making sure that we can provide to the auditor general as many emails as possible. And that has been 13,212 by October 13th. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? We're going to make sure that she has all of those documents by November 1st.

MPP Tabuns (NDP) to Minister Thibeault (Energy) - re: consequences of hydro rate reduction plan

>>MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. My question to the **Premier**. This week we learned that the **Premier** and her Liberal government are forcing Ontarians to pay an extra \$4 billion to hide the devastating effects of their \$40 billion hydro borrowing scheme from the public. But that's not the only thing that they're hiding. The auditor general's report says that based on the email correspondence her office looked at, the Liberals knew what the costs would be. They had other options. They were advised to take those other options, and still they stuck Ontario families with \$4 billion bill anyway. Will the **Premier** tell the people of Ontario, did she personally green-light this accounting trick, knowing it would cost families \$4 billion on their hydro bills?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very pleased once again to rise and answer questions on this and of course talk about the fair hydro plan as well. But let's first talk about the accounting. The government's financial statements are prepared in accordance with the public sector accounting standards and will continue to follow these standards for the transactions resulting from the fair hydro plan in the 2017 and 18 years and of course, Mr. Speaker, in future years. In regards to the rate regulation --Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So Does not prohibit the use of rate regular accounting, Mr. Speaker. So many entities in Canada, including O.P.G., Toronto hydro, fortis, Hydro One. Use rate accounting as well. In fact six of eight independent system operators across North America use rate regulating accounting and I'll get more to supplementary.

>>MPP Tabun: Speaker, I kind of hope the **Premier** will get to the supplementary. The a.g.'s report says that emails show senior government officials were warned of the cost of this plan and were told there were other options. Since the **Premier** refuses to release the emails of the A.G. Examiner in her investigation, can she tell us who were the senior government officials that were warned?

>> Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I get to rise and speak about our fair hydro plan. You know, Mr. Speaker, families in the province asked for real and immediate relief on their electricity bills and that's what we delivered. The fair hydro plan is providing an average of 25% to residential ratepayers. That's a cut, Mr. Speaker. And guarantees that electricity rates will not rise beyond the rate of inflation for four years and as many as half a million small businesses and farms are also benefitting. But we all knew, Mr. Speaker, that electricity rates risen too much too fast as a result of the investments that we made \$70 billion. And so that meant that we were paying off those investments too quickly. So the fair hydro plan smooths out the costs of those investments but over a longer period of time. And that means the system improvements are paid for by the people that use now the system now and of course use the system later, Mr. Speaker. And that's fair, because this plan makes sure that we also keep all of these assets on the electricity side with the ratepayer where they should be, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the **Premier**. The people of Ontario deserve to know who authorized this extra \$4 billion on their hydro bills. Yesterday I moved a motion to require these emails to be released publicly. The Liberals used their majority to shut down debate on that motion. The **Premier** has already set aside \$500,000 for a lawyer to organize these emails for the A.G.. It should be easy to release them now to the public. Will she?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've provided 13,212 emails to the auditor general and will make sure all of the emails that apply to this file we'll provide it to the auditor general by November 1st. We're constantly working, Mr. Speaker, with the auditor general's office and in constant contact with the office, Mr. Speaker. But let's take one step back and be very clear, Mr. Speaker. This decision with the fair hydro plan was a policy choice, a choice to ensure that we continue to have a clean, safe, reliable and affordable electricity system for the ratepayers of today and the ratepayers of tomorrow and the fair hydro plan keeps the cost of borrowing within the rate base, Mr. Speaker, not the tax base, because that's the logical and right thing to do. Electricity financing should remain within the electricity system. While the auditor general is welcome to her opinion, Mr. Speaker. Our plan has been approved by her peers at KPMG, Ian white and deloitte. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MPP Tabuns (NDP) to Minister Thibeault (Energy) re: cost of hydro rate reduction plan

>> MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again to the **Premier**. Hope springs eternal. One government official said this about the Liberals' determination to make people pay an extra \$4 billion on their hydro bills. Quote -- hopefully they'll come to the conclusion that the plan can be financed by the province rather than externally, as that would be a lot simpler and cheaper. Why does the **Premier** ignore the advice of nonpartisan public servants and push ahead with this financial cover-up?-Withdraw.

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to rise and once again talk about the importance of the policy choice that we made, Mr. Speaker. That policy choice was to ensure that we can have that clean, reliable and affordable system that we've talked

about. And I know, Mr. Speaker, that we keep talking about the importance of making sure that we keep electricity costs within the electricity system, and the fair hydro plan does that, Mr. Speaker. We have always ensured that, when O.P.G. Builds a new hydroelectric dam, when Bruce power, you know, refurbishes its nuke plants, Mr. Speaker. When we see Guelph hydro for example or any utility actually invest in their system, the cost borrowing stays within the electricity system. And that's why, Mr. Speaker, we brought forward this policy choice was to keep the cost of the electricity system in that sector, Mr. Speaker .

>>MPP Tabuns: Thank you. Her predecessor decided he didn't have to answer to the legislature either, and that at any time end well Speaker, the a.g.'s report says that senior government officials and staff cautioned against that expensive accounting trick. She said officials noticed the design of their \$40 billion borrowing scheme, quote, will result in higher costs for Ontarians, end quote. This was cut and dry. The Liberals were told, if they proceeded with the trick, it would cost people more, and they did it anyway. Why is the **Premier** putting her desperate reelection hopes ahead of the needs of Ontario families?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From my understanding, the **Premier's** previous predecessor, when he left, we ended up winning a majority government on this side of the House because we were the party that brought forward a plan that actually benefitted all of the people of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. None of them on that side, Mr. Speaker, had a plan --Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opposition parties had no plan then. They have no plan now, Mr. Speaker. We brought forward a plan that brought immediate relief, a policy choice that we made, Mr. Speaker. A policy choice that we made. To continue to ensure we have a clean, reliable and affordable system of electricity in this province, Mr. Speaker, and something that we'll continue to do for the people of Ontario.

>>MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. And again to the **Premier**, the **Premier's** \$40 billion hydro borrowing scheme was there are going to drive up hydro bills in the long run. To hide the cost she or someone in her Cabinet authorized a \$4 billion accounting trick and added it onto people's hydro bills. The A.G. Says the Liberals were warned about this. They were given other options and they simply ignored the advice from civil servants and went ahead anyway. The **Premier** won't tell us who green-lit this massive betrayal of the public trust. She refuses to release emails that show who in her party knew when and when. How many more desperate abuses of power does this **Premier** plan before the next election?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And that's unequivocally untrue, Mr. Speaker. We have always been open and transparent as a government. We'll continue to co-operate, Mr. Speaker, with the office of the auditor general. And of course, Mr. Speaker, Let me reiterate something --Like I started off with, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about what we have done so far. 13,212 emails that have been brought in to the auditor general. 1,200 emails and records from the IESO. Hundreds from the O.P.G., Mr. Speaker. 3,242 from the Ontario financing authority. Thousands of records from the treasury board, Mr. Speaker. In this process, Mr. Speaker, we have ensured that every day and throughout our operations we're adhering to all document retention standards.

MPP Fedeli (PC) to Minister Sousa re: recent FAO report on the government's debt reduction

>>MPP Fideli: Thank you and good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of finance. This morning we learned from the financial accountability office that the government's debt reduction claims are \$6.5 billion off the mark. The F.A.O. Said that's equal to eliminating funding for 40% of Ontario's hospitals, to put it in perspective. They painted a bleak and stark long-term budget outlook for Ontario. Meanwhile the government continues to insist they're on track even though they use the same data the financial accountability officer used. The F.A.O. Clearly stated, quote -- without an adjustment to Ontario's fiscal policy, we will see increasing budget deficits and higher levels of debt. The people of Ontario clearly cannot trust anything this government says. Speaker, will the Minister come clean about their debt claims and tell us what they plan to do to address the new concerns?

>>Minister Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. I appreciate the work done by the F.C. O. In regards to looking long term in terms of the demographic and challenges that not only Ontario -- he makes reference to the fact that all oecd countries around the world will be facing these challenges. We too came out with a long-term report last year realizing these issues. The F.A.O. Rightly states we have to take measures and have to address these long-term challenges. Exactly what it is we're doing in our budget today. We are looking long term in terms of the programs we put in place to support health care, to support education. In fact universal health care that's been expanded to youth under 25 is part of that. The work that we're doing with pension reform, it's part of that, both of which that side of the House have actually declined not to do, Mr. Speaker. We need to support these very measures. We need to manage our fiscal House. That's why we're balancing the books this year, next year and the year after that.

>>MPP Fideli: Back to the Minister. The F.A.O. confirmed again this morning that their so-called balance is all with the onetime asset sales and other onetime revenues, Speaker. But here's why what the financial accountability officer's said mass -- matters to families. Means there will be quote less fiscal room for spending on government priorities such as health and education. The F.A.O. Also said that Ontario is less able to respond to unforeseen events such as the next recession. Perhaps worst of all. Continuing on this course will unfairly shift the fiscal burden from baby boomers to younger Ontarians. Speaker, this week two independent officers of the legislature have disputed the Liberal --How can families ever trust anything this government says again?

>> Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, we came into office recognizing that the recession had hit us hard, recognizing that the Conservative government federally doubled their debt, has almost the highest deficit in Canada's history under their watch and we at this side of the House also recognize those challenges, why we stimulated growth, invested heavily in infrastructure to build our economy and support the people of Ontario. Today we're outpacing Canada and the G-7 countries. Today we have the lowest unemployment in 17 years. Today 730,000 net new job versus come to the province. And, Mr. Speaker, today we are continuing to invest long term to address the very challenges that the F.A.O. Has rightly cited, one that we accept and we are taking every step to manage going forward. And we are balancing, Mr. Speaker. We're balancing the books this year. We're balancing the books next year and the year after that, and those members have voted against those measures.

