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Sent: 2017-05-31 4:15:15 PM
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Subject: MEDIA EVENT: MINISTERS' PRE-CABINET SCRUMS

Attachments: May 31 - Ministers' Pre-Cabinet Scrums.doc

Energy Content Highlighted

MEDIA EVENT: MINISTER'S PRE-CABINET SCRUMS

May 31, 2017

Location:

Outside Legislature

Speakers:

Ministers Sousa; Hoskins; Lalonde; Liberal MPP Des Rosiers; NDP MPP Tabuns

Media Attendance:

Print – 9

TV – 7

Radio – 1

Media Outlets:

Jones – CP; Benzie – Star; Ferguson – Star; Rushowy – Star; Globe; Zochodne – QP Briefing; Nanji– QP Briefing; Reynolds – QP Briefing; Smith – QP Today; Crawley - CBC Radio/TV; Lamoureux - Radio Canada TV; Brule - Radio Canada/CJBC; Carter – Global; Bliss - CTV Ontario; Rath - CHCH Television; Tumelty - City TV; Morissette – TFO

Media Questions:

Questions for Minister Sousa:

[Joined in progress] We had anticipated a \$4.5 billion deficit by 2016. We're already at \$1.5 billion; much greater reduction. And, again, it's an assessment of independent forecasters. We take all those forecasts, temper them even further, just to be more prudent in our projections. And the FAO has reaffirmed – again, he has revised his numbers as well – showing the improvement that the Ontario economy has been enjoying and the continuation of that improvement. He too sees a tapering down of those results, an improvement of those results.

Q: Jones: The FAO said part of the reason it's in balance for 17/18 is the use of one-time monies, such as revenue from the sale of Hydro One and a number of other factors. Doesn't that then make it more difficult to come to balance the next year, without all that money?

Well, keep in mind that we always look at the...our assets. Every government looks at what it can do to even be more efficient and more effective, and repurposing of those assets or reinvestments in new ones. But the projection has already taken into account the economic growth of our province and the degree of spending that we've taken and the controls...the measure that we've taken. That's why we are balancing this year, next year and the year after that. And, again, as I said, we build in prudence into our projections as well. Thank you.

Questions for Minister Hoskins:

[Joined in progress] Medical specific.

Q: Tumelty: Yeah, medical marijuana. Medical marijuana. Is there a chance that in the future (inaudible) there is a beneficial effect? And why (inaudible)? I know the answer to that.

Do you want to tell me the answer?

Q: Rath: (Inaudible)

So medical marijuana specifically (inaudible) for a number of years now through federal legislation. It's permitted with prescription from a variety of licensed providers. It's not currently covered through the Ontario drug plan. We base our decisions on a review process, which is predicated on scientific evidence. So with any drug, for any purpose, now we have a national process, which in its first step goes through Health Canada for licensure approval. And then the provinces and territories together will get it, weigh the scientific evidence and look (inaudible) benefit than other alternatives that are currently available. But there are no such plans currently (inaudible).

Q: Rath: (Inaudible)

Which plan?

Q: Rath: About the medical marijuana. (Inaudible)

In the studies?

Q: Rath: Yeah. Or (inaudible) legalization.

You know, certainly...so when Health Canada looks at any drug, they look at it in a variety of ways; sometimes one form, sometimes many forms, depending on what the research and the evidence shows. And, quite frankly, the first step is that the manufacturer comes forward with the request for approval. And they often do that in a specific form, say injectable or oral or inhaled, in the case of marijuana. So it really is that process that takes place at the federal, at the national level, depending on the request for approval that comes forward, and the decision taken by Health Canada. But, again, there is nothing (inaudible) with regards to medicinal marijuana, either to look at it through the national process or for funding or at the provincial level.

Q: Rath: Why not?

Well, you know, I think it's a combination of things. It's the science with regards to the benefits of medicinal marijuana is, in many cases, limited. It's certainly limited to...the evidence, the science that is out there is limited potentially to a limited number of conditions. But, again, I think part of it is that the process that exists in this country is for licensing and approving and ultimately deciding whether it should be added to the provincial formularies or not, that first step is for a manufacturer to come forward and request approval for licence (inaudible) Canada. To my knowledge, that hasn't happened.

Q: Rath: I believe the reason we're asking is because there is a case in, I believe it's in (inaudible) where a woman is swearing (inaudible) that marijuana oil is really helping her kid not have seizures. It's the only medication (inaudible) to use, but she can't afford to buy it on the street. You know, shouldn't there be some sort of passionate grounds to supply this woman's kid with concentrates, so that the kid can function?

Well, you know, the scientific literature is conflicted with regards to the medical benefits of marijuana. And that's why it's important, and I think we'll have the opportunity as we go forward towards eventual legalization, where nationally and internationally more research needs to be done to determine if scientific evidence, the efficacy of cannabitol and the various (inaudible) that marijuana (inaudible). But at the current time there's, I think, you know, there's...the evidence, it's very limited. It's quite controversial as well. We've made decisions on listing medications, drugs, based on the science and the evidence. But, again, it's a process that in the first instance requires action at the federal level, and to my knowledge that hasn't happened.

Q: Rath: But if the federal government is considering legalizing marijuana for recreation, shouldn't they be funding and going about the research into whether this stuff is safe, you know, not leave it up to the private sector?

Well, I think that's probably a question that would be better asked of the federal government. But, again, that first step is (inaudible) federal government to (inaudible) and then consider (inaudible) an application that would allow for a manufacturer to receive, along the lines that I described, at both provincial and territorial levels. There are currently no plans to make medicinal marijuana part of the Ontario drug (inaudible).

Q: Rushowy: With regards to legalization, the CMA has said 18 is much too young for use. What age restrictions are Ontario looking at?

Well, you know, we're still looking at it. And there are a number of ministries and ministers that are involved, of course. I know the federal government has suggested 18, but giving the provinces and territories the ability to have it at a higher age if they so...if they feel that that is warranted. My role as Minister of Health is (inaudible) harm reduction, public education, so that Ontarians understand the risks involved. And part of the discussion what I'll bring to the table is the

evidence that is out there that shows consumption of marijuana, particularly through inhaling, but in any form at an early age or in teenage years, that it can have negative impacts on brain development. (Stop recording)

Q:

(Joined in progress) I'm not sure where the right place to land is. But I do know, as a doctor and as the Minister of Health that the brain continues to develop into the twenties. And there is good research, strong evidence out there that shows that marijuana – part of it is does related as well, and part of it is how it is consumed that can raise or lower the risk – but there is good evidence that it can and does impact brain development if consumed (inaudible).

Q: Rushowy: So are you thinking more in the twenties?

Well, we'll see, right. So I know what I'm bringing to the table, in terms of describing what the risks are. And so we'll work hard to get that balance right between respecting Ontarians right to make informed decisions, but also ensuring that they are well aware of what the risks are. And then I think, you know, clearly because the federal government has determined this, it will be 18 or older, right.

Questions for Minister Lalonde:

Q. Crawley: (joined in progress) (inaudible) you had a chance to figure out what you're going to do to this request?

We did receive the letter. It is my understanding that the OCPC is investigating this matter. Unfortunately I cannot comment on the process of that investigation.

Q. Crawley: But these are – these are – sorry, these are new investigations that I believe are separate from the civilian police investigation going on into the Thunder Bay (inaudible) that the current investigations that are happening are being done by the Thunder Bay police.

So there's – there's two investigations happening – well one for sure is the ORPD who's currently investigating and also as I understand the OCPC will be moving forward in an investigation and for those reasons unfortunately I cannot comment furthermore just to respect the process of the investigation.

Q. Nadeau: The chief and the elders are saying that the OPP is not federal (inaudible) to do an investigation about the Thunder Bay police. And the RCMP is best suited (inaudible). Isn't that embarrassing from your police, OPP?

I hear the concern of our leaders. You know, I have exchanged and I had conversation with our leaders (inaudible) grand chief (inaudible) and others. As I've said currently this is a matter that's currently under investigation and I (inaudible) comments just to respect the process of the investigation.

Q. Nadeau: (in French) You have received the letter.

(in French) Yes, I received the letter. What I have understood at the moment is that there is a process with the commission that will investigate and due to that fact, unfortunately it is difficult for me to comment (inaudible) of the process of the investigation.

Q. Nadeau: (in French) If the commission names an administrator and puts the Thunder Bay police under supervision, what would be your answer?

(in French) Once more, as I said, it's a process that is underway in terms of the investigation, so I will let the process (inaudible) and we'll see the investigation's findings, and we'll act and there will be, if there is an action to take, we'll take it.

Q. Nadeau: (in French) It's not the first time that there are deaths of young Indigenous people in the rivers at Thunder Bay. Three recently. Why hasn't the Liberal government done anything? Even your predecessor Mr. Orazietti did nothing about it.

(in French) Listen, I would just like to speak with the community, the families that are affected by these tragedies, to bring (inaudible) my condolences for these losses of life. And when we hear about a young person's death, it's always very sad. So I will bring my voice and condolences to the families, the friends, and the whole community (inaudible).

Q. Nadeau: (in French) The role of the (inaudible) you are not qualifying it, but when we say that the RCMP is more qualified to investigate (inaudible), what do you respond to that?

(in French) Listen, as I said right now, I have received the letter (inaudible) and other chiefs. The commission will do its investigation, and from there, from their results, we will see, evaluate the next necessary steps (inaudible).

Q. Crawley: Okay, so can you just be clear though? I know you can't comment on the request that's come from the First Nations, but are you going to respond to their request?

I'm always engaging with our First Nations so we are definitely having conversations with Grand Chief Fiddler on all matters. As I've said, I share my condolences to Grand Chief Fiddler and all the community, the family of those young lives that were – that were lost. At this point, we know that the OCPC is conducting an investigation from the letters that were sent. So this process will take place. And respectfully we will – respectfully support the process and once the investigation is complete and we know, we'll see the response that they would be, if there's any actions that we have to take, we will be taking. If it's something that's resolved into the OCPC mandate, I'm sure they will act (inaudible).

Q. Crawley: Okay so that means – effectively that's a no. You are not going to agree to request that the RCMP come in and take over this investigation.

So there's a process within the purview of my role. OCPC is the investigators' body that will do the process for looking into the matter. They will make their conclusion. Once that step has taken place, we'll see their conclusion, and if there's any actions we need to take, I will take them. At this point, there's an investigation taking place and I will respect that investigation and the conclusion of that investigation.

Questions for MPP Des Rosiers:

Q. Brule: (in French) youth, for children, in –

(in French) I thought that we had written you when we sent you the information.

Q. Brule: (in French) No, I didn't receive it.

(in French) The information from Minister Coteau had to have been sent (inaudible) should have been done.

Q. Brule: (in French) (inaudible) I'll do a follow-up on this next week, but what is there in there for Francophones?

(in French) Well there is certainly – the law, I think that it has been passed now, it provides a guarantee that the cultural identity of children who are being placed under protection. The minister has committed to further work with the commissioner Boileau to ensure that there are services in French a bit everywhere in Ontario, not just in certain children's aid societies. So this is his commitment to further work to see how this can be implemented on the ground. But I think that it's important that it is in the law this recognition that there is a cultural identity of children that must be protected.

Q. Brule: (in French) But he wanted an active offer, so when we meet children, 'do you want to speak in French?' It's not necessarily in the law, so maybe the service providers won't think of it and there may be young people that won't be (inaudible), even some families.

(in French) I think that it takes more than the law to have an active offer. It will really be in the service agreements and all that. But I think that there is truly – it was a very good idea to have Commissioner Boileau raise this issue in the public hearings because it has given more visibility to this issue of the active offer having to be everywhere, in all services, not only in the ones we traditionally associate with the need for services in French. So I think that it was a good idea and now we will see how we can follow up on it in a realistic way on the ground here, and change the culture a bit. So I would be happy to continue to work on this next year too.

Questions for NDP MPP Tabuns:

Q. Carter: Will you say those three words?

It's a determining issue in this election.

Q. Carter: Will you say those three words, sir?

I'm going to say it's great to have investment in local festivals in Ontario.

Q. Carter: Giant rubber duckie.

Alan, I know you are obsessed with this and that it's deep in your soul.

Q: Carter: Why can't you just say, giant rubber duckie? Why can't you say it?

Because I'm trying to speak to the larger issue and that is investing in local events.

Q: Carter: Andrea said yesterday she is pro-duck. Are you?

Yeah. I'm going to take the leader's word on this. If she is pro-that, I think it's a great idea.

Q: Carter: Did you just say duck?

No. He speaks on his own. He's a free ranging guy.

Q: Morrisette: On the FAO report, what do you think of the number?

Well, the FAO does really high quality work. He has said that the Liberals are balancing the books by engaging in one-time asset sales. He's right. We've said it for a long time that the selloff of Hydro One had everything to do with making the books look good and nothing to do with infrastructure. I think he has validated that. In fact, the selloff of Hydro One means that our revenue is going to decline in the years to come, another reason why it's a huge mistake to have that selloff.

Q: Morrisette: Do you think the budget is balanced?

Not according to what he had to say. And, frankly, it leads to another question. If they only balanced the budget by selling off assets, what else is on the table? Really, what else is on the table?

Q: Brule (In French): This is giving you ammunition. You and the Conservatives are saying this is budget which is not balanced.

(In French): It is balanced only because the Liberals have sold Hydro One. Without that, it is not balanced. It is that simple. And the FAO has confirmed this.

Q: Brule: [Speaking French] And in the coming years, we won't have....

(In French) In the coming years, it will be very difficult unless the government decides to sell other things. But that is not a good thing for the people of Ontario.

Q: Brule: [Speaking French] So you think that is part of the plan? To sell more provincial assets?

(In French) At this moment, yes.

Q: Ferguson: Why don't you want to say giant rubber duckie? For Alan.

I don't know. I like Alan. I caught on the Pee-Wee Herman thing.

Q: Tumelty: (Inaudible) Can you sing a verse of it?

No, I'm terrible at singing. Believe me, I could lose the party in the next election if I sang...

Q: Brule: [Speaking French] In French – the duck?

(In French) A duck, yes, it is a good thing.

Q: Zochodne: How happy are you that the government has finally got its Fair Hydro Act through the legislature?

I actually think that what they have done will damage this province for decades to come. And it's a one-two hit. The selloff of Hydro One reduces our control and drives up cost. They are trying cover this problem over with a huge amount of money. We are going to get stuck with that bill. It could fundamentally weaken the hydro system in this province and our economy. Totally irresponsible what they've done in this area, totally irresponsible.

Q: Zochodne: So you won't be celebrating on Canada Day when the 17 per cent extra comes off the bill?

No because I know 34 per cent will come on the bill later.

Q: Brule: [Speaking French] With the \$15 minimum wage announcement by the Liberals yesterday, what is left in the NDP program that the Liberals have not stolen?

(In French) People need to understand the Liberals took 14 years to act. Only in the final year do they decide to act. Are you confident that a government which does not act for more than a dozen years is a party which cares about the working people? What do you think? This is a government which does not think about the working people in this province. It is that simple. And only the last year of its mandate.

N.B.: Comments captured are not verbatim quotes

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