

MEDIA EVENT: MINISTERS' PRE-CABINET SCRUMS

February 15, 2017

Location:

Outside Cabinet Meeting Room, Legislature

Speakers:

Ministers Thibeault; Sandals

Media Attendance:

Print – 7

TV – 3

Radio – 0

Media Outlets:

Jones – CP; Benzie – Star; Ferguson – Star; Zochodne – QP Briefing; Smith Cross – QP Briefing; Nanji – QP Briefing; Lamoureux – Radio Canada TV; Carter – Global; Rath – CHCH Television; Cruickshank – iPolitics; Smith – QP Today

Media Questions:**Questions for Minister Thibeault**

Q: Ferguson: OK so how many more weeks till we see this package. And I understand the Premier said some stuff would require legislation. So will be kind of being phased in. You know some things you can do immediately and other things might be taken a bit longer?

You know many things as well as we're talking about right now some of it may require legislation. You know we might be able to just change the regulations so you know all the things that we're looking at right now and there are still many things on the table you know where we're working as quickly as we can on this. I know the Premier has talked about the importance of having something before a budget and you know that's that's where we're going to continue to push. Obviously I would like to have something as quickly as possible because I know there are families out there and businesses out there that are having a hard time. But for me right now it's making sure that we get the right program to do it right.

Q: Ferguson: How much more relief could people see? We've got the 8 percent HST waiver. We've got 20 percent for the R4. What more can people expect in terms of percentage or dollar value?

You're calling that the triple I.P.?

Q: Ferguson: Yeah.

Welcome to my world everything being an acronym, an anagram.

Q: Ferguson: And that is also be a part of the question because you know the hydro system is getting to be like the income tax system where there's so many moving parts, it's confusing to people and it gets harder and harder to navigate. So aside from how much people are going to save is there anything you're doing to try to simplify the whole piece?

So you know we are trying to help people save as much as they can. Those are things that we're looking at right now. But you know if I go back to my Empire Club of Canada speech back in early December, in November when that was. And you know there are things that we can do like market reform that will take a long time to implement but can help and make savings over the long run. So as I said all along everything is on the table within reason. I am going to continue to look and work with my ministry and with the Premier's Office and with Treasury

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	and with Finance to try and continue to find ways to get the proper programs in place to ensure that we can help with rate mitigation.
Q: Ferguson: But you can't see at this point how much more people could save?	You know what I can't say right now and I wish I could.
Q: Ferguson: Could it be like twice as much as they're saving now depending on where they live?	That would be an unfair comment for me to make because I don't want to either set expectations low or too high. We really do want to ensure that we get this right and that's why you know we're working late, late hours and every single day to ensure that we can get something done on this as quickly as we can.
Q: Lamoureux: But will it make a difference in people's budget?	That's my full intention is to ensure that we can get this to make a difference. Looking at structural change to looking at regulation change looking at legislation you know. We understand from that you know from the get go that people are having a hard time with bills. But you know that relates to us having to rebuild the system from 2003 to where we are now. And you know I'm just, I get that we need to take it to the next level to actually help people with their bills.
Q: Carter: I understand that you're not really ruling anything out but you've already dipped into a billion dollars into the treasury for each year for the eight per cent. Would you say that you're going to go back to the Treasury for more relief for rate payers?	If that's what it takes to ensure that we find ways to help rate payers then that's conversations that I have to continue to have with the Ministry of Finance and with the Treasury and with the Premier's Office. We're already doing that. I'm already having those conversations because some of the proposals that we're looking at will require moving some things on to the tax base or creating it on the tax base. But again it's all like I said it's all, you know, in the works. And as soon as we can will actually come forward with the recommendations and have a conversation with all of you.
Q: Zochodne: So we know the plan is coming before the next budget. When are people actually going to get the savings that you guys are promising? You know the eight per cent rebate took four to five months to show up on bills.	Right now we have about 70 LDCs in the province. You know all of them, no matter what type of mitigation piece that we come in with, and they'll have to work on us. So hopefully we can work with them and get this done quickly because we recognize that we want to be able to have some help soon as we can.
Q: Zochodne: Before the next election?	Oh, for sure.
Q: Carter: On Bill 27, why not break out the part on winter disconnections for hydro. The opposition says they would pass it without debate.	So first off I've been told that you can't break that out if we were to pull that legislation out, it would have to start all over again. So to have that specific piece we would have to start over at square one once again. So my thing is on that is why didn't they support it before. When I asked previously that we could have had unanimous consent on that we could get this passed. So for me I find it a little bit rich for Patrick and Andrea to come out now and say you know let's pull this out. We could have

	passed this a lot sooner and had this done and then we could have made sure that those that would have been implemented in time.
Q: Carter: But it's an omnibus bill. You never did take it out as its own piece.	They could have easily supported that. And that's one of the things I would say they supported that bill.
Q: Carter: You put everything but the kitchen sink in there.	I just find it kind of ridiculous that they're coming out and saying that they want to see this and pull it out when we're going to start all over again. It's in committee right now. Get it through committee and bring it right back.
Q: Carter: Why didn't you bring that in as its own piece? You would have done by and you would have taken care of what you say you care about which is winter disconnection.	But it is this government that brought it forward in June of 2016. Right? We brought this forward in June of 2016 recognizing that winter disconnection shouldn't be something that these LDCs are doing anymore. So when we brought it forward we're the party that recognized it but they didn't want to support it at that time. And I say that I find it a little bit ridiculous that they're now saying they want this to be pulled out to start the whole process over again. Pass it through committee, get it in the House and we will make sure that it passes quickly.
Q: Zochodne: But you guys have a majority. Could have not have just pushed it through? So it should be done before winter?	One of the things that we're making sure of is that we follow the democratic process, that it's gone through its process. It's now in committee. And you know what we'll make sure that we get it passed as quickly as we can and we're hoping that, you know, Patrick and Andrea are true to their word and we'll support this bill to get it into the house so we can pass it.
Q: Zochodne: Arguably, they are engaging in a democratic process, too, by, you know, even if they are shenanigans, they are duly elected representatives, they can do that – so why not just give it a boot?	We're going to give it as much of a push as we possibly can because we recognize that we want this bill passed as quickly as possible, because we do recognize that winter disconnections is something that we don't want to see the LDCs do, but we recognize Hydro One has also come forward and stepped up to the plate and, you know, I think reversed their decision on 1,400 customers – I think it ended up being 600 people that they got re-connected because a lot of those places were either abandoned land sites or different things, but you know it's good to see companies like that making those changes.
Q: Carter: Why don't you just (inaudible) direct the OEB to do that, you can do that? Just issue a directive to the OEB – there's no more winter disconnections as for tomorrow.	So, one of the things we did is we gave the OEB the powers to make sure that disconnections take, you know, the process they have to go through, the 10 days, all of that other stuff that I know you know. And for us, it's important that the OEB continue to follow that, and we're going to make sure they have the powers through this bill to actually do that.
Q: Carter: You didn't answer my question. A ministerial directive and it's done – no more winter disconnections in this province.	So, you know, the ministerial directive is not something we do with the OEB. We actually communicate with them, and work with them, and give them ideas of what

	we'd like to see – if it's letters on, for example, the gas study, and those type of things. But the OEB is an actual quasi-judicial organization that is our regulator, and that we have to respect, they are the ones that make those type of decisions.
Q: Ferguson: Glenn, what's this hydro, I don't know if I should call it a pacification program or not, that's coming – do you have to kill this issue dead?	Can you re-phrase that question for me?
Q: Ferguson: Hydro is one of the biggest lightning rods for this government right now, hydro prices, so do you have to come out with this as basically a pacification program, to give people enough release that it kills this as an issue?	You know, I want to be able to address the issues that people are talking to the Premier and to my ministry and to MPPs about. But I'll go back to 2003 when I took over as the Executive Director of the United Way in Sudbury – the very first program that I actually worked on was helping families with their energy bills. So this is not something that's just been around for the last year, you know, this has been around and this has been an issue for consecutive elections and for consecutive governments. I'm going to continue to work to try and find ways to help these people who are struggling, and these businesses. This isn't an issue I'm looking to pacify, it is an issue I'm sure it's going to continue to be around when it comes to energy. But I do recognize that some people are finding our current status unaffordable and we do need to help with that.
Questions for Minister Sandals:	
Q:	(Joined in progress) to reduce contributions until you have used up the surplus. And historically, that is certainly what has happened with the teachers' pension plan. And that's exactly the logic that the pension panel used to say, yes, there is a surplus here, is because, if you can use, if you can reduce, it works a little bit differently, the mechanics of the two plans. But either way, we have to take less cash from the current operating budget of the government of Ontario to pay pension premiums. And that represents money that if we are not spending it on pension premiums, we can spend it on healthcare or education or highways, whatever you like. But we can spend it on something else, other than pension contributions. And that's exactly why it's a surplus.
Q: Benzie: So minister, you haven't, presumably you haven't heard back yet from the Auditor General if she's accepted the findings of the expert panel, have you?	As I've said to a number of people that, there is no urgency because we haven't even come to the end of the fiscal year end question, and we certainly haven't prepared the accounts for the fiscal year that hasn't ended yet, so there's no urgency on the Auditor making up her mind. I'm actually quite pleased that she's taking the time to have a thorough look at what the panel had to say because I think my takeaway from all of this is that I was very pleased with the very thorough, very technical analysis that the panel did. They talked to the controller,

	they talked to Auditor, and then they pulled out every standard available that could possibly be applied and did a very technical analysis. And I think the report is really valuable, from that point of view, because it's very transparent in terms of explaining how to properly apply the accounting standards.
Q: Benzie: Now what happens if she doesn't agree with the findings? Do you, and won't sign off on the Public Accounts – what then?	I think we're getting way ahead of ourselves.
Q: Benzie: That's a hypothetical, at this point?	I think that's a total hypothetical, we're getting way ahead of ourselves. The pension panel has agreed with the view of the controller, and deputies, and bureaucrats past, from two different governments, and Auditors past. The pension panel has agreed with their analysis with a very deep, thorough, technical analysis, and we did exactly what we said we'd do – is we would appoint an expert panel and we have accepted the findings of the experts. So that's all I can say.
<i>N.B. : Comments captured are not verbatim quotes</i>	
Prepared by:	

Guy Lepage, Senior Issues Analyst
Jonathan Colford, Senior Issues Analyst
Craig Sumi, Manager, Corporate Issues