Message

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Subject: MEDIA EVENT: MINISTERS' PRE-CABINET SCRUMS

Attachments: April 5 - Ministers' Pre-Cabinet Scrums.doc

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Energy Content Highlighted

MEDIA EVENT: MINISTERS' PRE-CABINET SCRUMS
April 5, 2017

Location:
Outside Cabinet Meeting Room, Legislature

Speakers:
Ministers Thibeault; Ballard: Naidoo-Harris; Sousa; Sandals; PC Leader Brown; NDP Leader Horwath

Media Attendance:
Print – 12
TV – 6
Radio – 0

Media Outlets:
Jones – CP; Smith Cross – CP; Benzie – Star; Ferguson – Star; Rushowy – Star; Cohn – Star; Globe; Jeffords – Sun; Zochodne – QP Briefing;Nanji– QP Briefing; Crawley - CBC Radio/TV; Lamoureux - Radio Canada TV; Brule - Radio Canada/CJBC; Global; Golding - CTV Ontario; Rath - CHCH Television; Tumelty - City TV; Wu – Fairchild TV; Fortin-Gauthier – TFO; Cruickshank – iPolitics; Smith – QP Today

Media Questions:
Questions for Minister Thibeault:

(Joined in Progress) we are reviewing, you know, the framework that we put in place and you know the one thing I'm sure you've heard me say in question here today is you know here's the man that runs our nuclear facilities. And I want to ensure that he is paid fairly and not at the highest level and not at you know at the lowest level because we were in the past losing good staff from OPG. So our framework had to be able to ensure that we could keep our people and part of that is looking at the framework that we've had in place that we can make sure that we can compensate individuals fairly.

Q: Zochodne: But as part of his compensation, you get a earned bonus one year, you get paid in the following year. Which is why you also had Tom Mitchell getting paid like five hundred sixty thousand dollars last year even though he had been retired from the company since August 2015. Is that not the most transparent way to go about this or is it just a bit of sleight of hand to slow the hit to the Sunshine list?

Well with the Sunshine List, it's important for us to recognize that you know the Sunshine List reports the salary that we make. And you know when we talk in general, when you're asked about how much you make, you're not well and my pension down the road will be this much. And that is what we report from the Sunshine List. But as I mentioned here's a guy who's running our nuclear plants and we want to ensure that we're on time and on budget and right now we're ahead of schedule and below budget. And that's thanks to you know the expertise that he has, that he's brought from his other jobs in the past in the U.S. and that's why we used him and OPG with their expertise with our fair hydro plant. We all know the fair hydro plant, 25 percent reduction. But when you're looking at you know what the leader has of the opposition, he has no plan. All he can do right now is you know write policy about hockey. He doesn't have time to write energy policy. And you know what, we have a plan that is actually going to bring rates down for everyone.
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Q: Zochodne: I asked this of the Treasury Board President, maybe I should ask you. In 2014, you guys did commission Jim Leash to do a report on electricity pensions. And it warned that the pensions were so gold plated that they might be

actually driving rates up. Is the $460,000 contribution that Mr. Leash received to his pension and well some big contributions to other executives. a contributing factor in increasing Ontario's electricity prices?

So when looking at where the cost of our electricity comes from, it's in the generation. When you're looking at the overall costs of executive salaries we're not even talking about anything that would be close a cent. So taking that into consideration we still recognize that the salaries are high, we acknowledge that. But we are also acknowledging that these people come with some expertise that is very very important for us to recognize and retain because we do have the largest nuclear fleet in the world based here in Ontario when you take in Bruce and Darlington and Pickering, we need to ensure that we keep you know safety as a priority in having these good people will do just.

Q: Zochodne: Like with any organization, most of your costs are labour and OPG (inaudible) costs to submit to the OEB. Isn't executive compensation a contributing factor to the increase cost of electricity in Ontario?
So again we're talking about not even a cent that would be coming off of any one's bill if we were to eliminate the executive salaries. So when we're comparing apples to apples, the costs of our system come from generation. We made those changes through the global adjustment by a fair hydro plan and the fair hydro plan is assuring that we're taking 25 percent off of everyone's rates. So rates are going down significantly for everyone. That's why we have a plan. The opposition doesn't have a plan. They talk about you know hockey policy as the priority right now. The priority for us is making sure that we work with the people of Ontario because when you don't have a plan for electricity you don't have a plan for Ontario.

Q: Jones: I want to return to the OPG compensation story. I apologize, the finance minister just tried to sneak away. Were you satisfied by the letter that they sent? I was not clear. Are you satisfied even though the Premier said take another look at that $3.8M that came back and said that stays in place but here's what the actual maximum will be.

And I agree you know with the Premier when she asked them to take another look, they did that, they took another look. And I recognize that we have some very good people on the board who would also take a look at all of these and they brought forward their recommendations of making sure that we can keep the good qualified people that we have OPG and make sure that the framework looks at comparators and makes sure that our comparators are on track to making sure that it's fair and reasonable within their sector. And really there's no other comparators for OPG right? Like really in Canada, you've got to look to New Brunswick where they have one plant where OPG has many many plants. So you know that comparator was difficult but when it came back, you know we're comfortable with where they're at. I recognize these are high salaries. That's why we have the framework and that's why the Premier won is the second look. And I respect the work the board is doing.

Q: Jones: And you concerned that $1.9 creep closer to $3.8 because it is there as the regulated cap?

You know that's that's really hard for me to answer. It's a hypothetical and you know we would obviously work with the board because we do ensure that we want to keep, you know, salaries in check. We also want to ensure that the framework that we have in place will work with those comparators. And that's what we'll actually work with the board on is making sure that we don't continue to see what we were having before at OPG which was some of the loss of our really good people because they can go and get paid a lot more in other places. Thanks everyone.
Questions for Minister Ballard:

Q. Smith Cross: (joined in progress) growth plan that would help ease the pressure on the housing market.

Yeah, what I can speak is the fact that when it comes to rental we've been – we'll be moving on some pretty aggressive expansion of the rental controls. We have put in place already a number of – of key tools that municipalities can use around secondary suites, and that addresses supply. We've brought inclusionary zoning in that speaks to more affordable housing. So we're working with our municipalities to make it easier for them to bring the supply of housing online.

Q. Golding: But we're not talking about rentals right now, just about 33-per-cent price hike. What do you say to people who are out there trying to buy homes and it's just becoming so unaffordable in the (inaudible)?

Yeah, well I would – I would say that we need to continue to work with the municipalities. We know that – that in talking to our municipal partners, that there is about a little over four years of – of land that – that is available for development. It's permitted, it's ready to go, so the – there is – there is housing – there is land for housing. We need to continue working with municipalities to make sure that – that they get that housing to – to market.

Q. Golding: Are there any measures that the government is prepared to take to try to cool the market down and bring prices down?

Well we have to be careful about what we do on that side, right? We have (inaudible) very cautious about what we – what we do (inaudible) housing affordability. For many Ontarians, you know, their house is their biggest asset that they have. They're looking at their house as something that will get them through their retirement years, so we have to be very cautious, at the same time recognizing that for so many Ontarians they feel shut out of the housing market.

Q. Golding: Well a lot of senior economists are talking about a bubble. And what do you say in response to them?

Well, a lot of economists and analysts are saying we're not in a bubble, that Ontario – Ontario, especially the GTHA is experiencing unprecedented growth. We have over 100,000 people moving here every year. We've got a booming economy here in Ontario. And so people are moving from across the country, from around the world to be here. That's putting real pressure on the growth here. So some economists – a number of economists are saying in fact it's not a bubble. This is – this is where we're going to land. That's what we need to address.

Q. Golding: One last question. Are you going to consider eliminating land transfer tax for first-time buyers as a way to help people struggling with affordability?

I would say stay tuned for a wide range of measures. I can't speak to that one specifically.

Q. Brule: But do you understand that every month that you wait it seems like the prices are going up and up and up. (Inaudible) 27 per cent in February, now it's 33 so (inaudible) when are measures coming out?

Well when it comes to – to housing affordability, there will be some – some things announced. With – in terms of rental, which is an area that I'm really focusing on because I have control of the – the rental tenancy act, we're going to see some measures brought forward fairly soon.

Q. Brule: In the budget?

Stay tuned.

Q. Smith Cross: What – what can you tell us about what can the government do to encourage more building faster on the land that is available within the GTHA to develop on?

Well I think, you know, we have to work with our municipal partners. We have to work with builders, right? I hear from mayors who say they have – I mean, Rob Burton, the mayor of Oakville, was interviewed last week and talked about 6,000 – space for 6,000 units that are permitted, ready to go. I think we need to understand from our developers and from our municipal partners how we can move that faster. I'm convinced that there is enough land, maybe around speeding the process up on behalf of builders because time is money. We need to look at all of that. But certainly there is a lot of serviced land ready to go right now.

Q. Smith Cross: What is the hold-up with you? What is the hold-up right now? (Inaudible)

Depends who you talk to. I mean everyone I talk to identifies an issue, a different issue and a different solution. So what the builders are saying, municipal governments are pushing back at. As a – as a provincial government, we're trying to analyze. We're getting those numbers. We're trying to analyze (inaudible) come up with some right solutions, some good solutions that don't actually make the situation worse.

Q. Smith Cross: When do you expect to have sort of a better handle on issue where you know what the causes are and (inaudible) can take action (inaudible)?

Well I think we'll – we'll be seeing some action, and you know all I can say is stay tuned. I hate to sound like a broken record but stay tuned. There are some – some things coming down the pipes.

Q. Cruickshank: Minister, the Conference Board of Canada released a report today that showed Ontario's lagging on things like (inaudible) equality, gender and racial wage gaps, and poverty. What was your reaction to that?

Well my reaction is that – that Ontario has done some great things in terms of reducing poverty. Certainly one Canadian, one Ontarian living in poverty is [end audio]

Questions for Minister Naidoo-Harris:

Q: Crawley: So in light of the conviction here, what has the government done since to improve the situation in daycares?

Well absolutely when it comes to children and their safety in child care centers. Let me just tell you when this case moved forward we brought in the Child Care In The Early Years Act and that was several years ago and it was done in order to strengthen enforcement. And what this essentially does is set up an enforcement team. That team now investigates when there are complaints when there are concerns that families have and they have a number of tools in place that they can use to really act on a complaint or concern.

Q: Crawley: Can you guarantee at all that something like this can happen again?

Well you know this is life; we can't guarantee things. But what we can do is ensure that our children are safe and that we are creating an environment that is going to really do the best we can to ensure that our children are in a safe and healthy environment and able to reach their full potential. We put safeguards in place, those safeguards are there right now. What this essentially is is an enforcement team. We have a Web site where people can go to if they have concerns about a particular child care center that they are wondering about. In addition we're encouraging parents. I mean people should just pick up the phone if they if they are worried about something let us know. We have teams in place. They can go in, they can bring in fines, they can shut down a child care center. They have a number of resources at their disposal that they can use to ensure that we do the best we can to keep our children safe.

Q: Brule: How many people work in the enforcement team?

I don't have those numbers for you right now but I can certainly get them for you.
Q: Crawley: How do you measure to know it is working?

Well I think the bottom line is ensuring that our children are safe. When families drop their children off, that they are really feeling comfortable. You know, licenced child care has pieces in place to monitor situations. Again our ministry is there with our enforcement team and following up on any complaints that are made to (inaudible).

Q: Crawley: But this was an unlicensed daycare centre was it not?

So this particular…so I can't really comment on the specific case that is before the board. So you know I really have to be careful and aware of that so I can't talk specifically about this case.

Questions for Minister Sousa:

Q: Golding: Could you talk to us about the new numbers with housing - 33 percent increase in March.

Yeah, so it's obvious - there's increasing demand; we've been talking about this for some time - certainly reflection of a growing economy of our, ah, in Ontario. And it's a great destination. We had tremendous job growth; it's creating contriteness demand. We recognize that, with that demand coming - higher prices, we've got to find ways to get supply into the mix. But we also recognize there's no consensus amongst the, the stakeholders and others to what to do next. So, we're doing our utmost to try to be comprehensive in our approach, and looking at ways to foster support - especially for those that are trying to get into the marketplace; without having unintended consequences from what, any decisions that we make.

Q: Golding: But, when are you gonna make any concrete steps. Every month, it just seems to be going up so much and people are talking about a potential bubble here, so their (inaudible) keep losing houses. I mean, can you tell us about what kind of concrete steps your gonna take?
Well, we have taken steps already, in terms of working with the federal government to look at some stress tests. We've also provided some incentives for first time homebuyers. We've frozen taxes on rental properties and apartment buildings to, again, faster some greater equity in the system. But every step forward, every growth numbers in our economy, every new job that's being created - is creating a magnet to, to the area, and that's creating demand. We also need to find ways to promote some supply into the mix and we've having discussions with municipal partners as well as how to do that effectively.

Q: Golding: One last question, would you consider eliminating the land transfers tax for first time buyers as a way to help people struggling with affordability?

Well we have actually done so for the first 400,000, thereabouts, in home prices, right? We've doubled the, the, that land transfer tax grant to $4000 - so we've taken some steps in that regard already.
Q: Brule: But, $400,000 is not even half, now, of the average price of a home in Toronto.
Yeah, and it's double what we already had initially. So we recognize, we recognize that there's there's a there's a hot demand and growth in the economy - it's evident to us all. How do we deal with it - Is, is an issue that we have to still resolve. Because, as I've said, there's no consensus. People are still trying to gather data and, and, and evidence as to

what to do in an effective way. So we have to bema, ah, take every precaution necessary not to harm anyone, as we proceed forward - while still facilitating and tempering the market so as it not to be in a position where we can have extreme results. So we exercise, and we're taking every step to do just that.

Q: Golding: Minister, when will you actually take these steps? When do you think you are actually gonna do something?

Well we, as I've said, we already have taken a number of steps, and we are having ongoing discussions - and we're trying to obtain as much evidence as possible because of the results of any unintended consequences from those decisions.

Q: Crawley: Minister, is it actually a bad thing, the prices are rising so much?
Well, as I said, it's a reflection of the great growth in Ontario. I mean, we becoming a destination of choice for many - over a hundred thousand more people are coming to the city and to Ontario. The job growth numbers are tremendous - and that's creating confidence in the system, and creating demand for homes. And, as you can see there's tremendous amount of inventory in Ontario and in Toronto specifically. So the degree of supply that's available - There are some that are asking us to expedite it more quickly. But there is supply; and there is room for growth in, in the GTA.

Q: Golding (inaudible) economists saying that we've got a bubble going on and that it could have disastrous consequences.
Well, absolutely we have to be cautious - because the growth year over year has been tremendous. And, that is, that is making it difficult for buyers - for first time buyers - to get into the marketplace; for young people to get into the market. What used to be where you can get in, with a starter home, well, what is a starter home today in the GTA. It's becoming problematic, so we have to take steps to try to resolve it.

Q: Crawley: Minister, are you considering anything other than land transfer tax measures in terms of helping those - specifically helping those first time buyers?
We're looking at a comprehensive overview of what we can do, and as I said, there's no consensus by anybody as to what it should be there - is no silver bullet here. And, again - be cautious about the unintended consequences of any one decision. We have to take it into a, a, a wholesome look. We have to work with our municipal partners. We are working with the federal government to the extent that we can provide some assistance in measuring and enforcing some of the measures that we think may be appropriate. But, recognizing - we need evidence, we need information, we need data - at this point I don't have consensus from anybody as to what that data says and how to proceed. what is evidence, and what's obvious is that pricing in the GTA has gone up tremendously. We've got to find a way to help.

Q: Golding: How much longer is it gonna take to get this data and have this data analyzed, though?

Well, we're having data; we're making, ah, we're getting information all the time. Ah, and it's then, how do we then implement something that's effective - is the key. So we, we, we will be coming forward with something in regards to this. And, as I've said, we have made measures; we have taken steps already. But, to what extent any one measure will have a positive impact - or negative impact - is, is questionable; and we're still trying to ensure that we put nobody in harm’s way.

Q: Crawley: I know there will be measures in your budget, but are you gonna do things outside of the budget - like, after the budget as well (inaudible)?

Well, I mean it's evident - I mean that a budget is a living document, right? I mean it, the budget is enabling us to provide forward a plan to act upon. But, with a plan comes challenges on an ongoing basis, and you have to react effectively to those challenges; not just at one point in time, but throughout the year. So, that's that's always at our disposal.

Q: Nanji: The Premier and the Housing Minister said we're going to find out more about these reforms soon. Can you be more specific than that?

I mean, you know we do have a document coming forward. We know that we, we're working on this possibly.

Q: Nanji: (interjects) So when will that happen?

So will be coming out with some resolve to the extent that we've had, we've done some already. We will be coming out with something more. And, again, we're trying to find, foster consensus; and the ability to work with the respective partners to make it so.

Q: Tumelty: Minister, John Tory this morning - Mayor John Tory this morning was very complimentary on what the actions the federal government has taken towards the housing market. And, he threw down the challenge for you to match those, ah, those incentives with the industry of public housing. Are you going to do that

Ontario, as a government, has or has partnered with the municipalities - and specifically with Toronto. Over 10 billion plus has been invested into this city. We have provided increased revenue just recently to match the tolls that he was requesting, without administration, right? We have, we have actually matched his requirement to provide for greater support for revenue. Ah, we've done this without him incurring any administrative costs. At the same time when it comes to social housing so forth, we have always been there. We're going to continue to provide support. And, when it comes to the federal government - they are playing some degree of catch up, because Ontario has always been a partner, and has always supported the cities. And we've uploaded -just recently - $565 million - just for the city of Toronto, last year. So we are out of there. We always have been.

Q: Brule: Minister, are you gonna have some studies to see if your, ah, the measures in your budget are gender equitable for women and families.

That's a great question, because Ontario - and everything we do - is always taking into consideration gender equality. We move forward with the first and only Minister of status of women, in Ontario. That was provided by the Premier. Ah, we've taken steps around violence against women, and other measures to provide for support. We've increased childcare spaces and supports so more women can be in the workplace - and we actually have, and show leadership - for women on boards. I mean, I'm a vice chair of that, that initiative; and everywhere I go outside of Canada, they ask: how was it that Ontario's taken such a leadership on women on boards, whereas others haven't - and through that, we have actually promoted or (inaudible) support - more executives more C series development of women in the corporations. And it's all about providing gender equity, and frankly, gender pay - equity in pay; and the Minister of Labour is doing quite a bit in that regard too.

Q: Nanji: Do you support MPP DiNovo's motion that's coming forward today calling for a gender lens on the budget.

We always have paid attention to a gender lens in everything we do. It's not at one point, in time is throughout every policy, throughout every effort. We now have more women on Boards in Ontario than any other jurisdiction. And, we're trying to encourage the private sector to do the same. We're asking them to at least put 30 percent; so we can encourage more representation. And, it's not just a social benefit. It's an economic benefit because they outperform others where they so. We will always proceed with a gender lens in the work that we do. It's not just at one point in time.

Q: Brule: (inaudible) the measures that are in the budget - are there some studies done on the measures?

Oh, we've done much in regard to gender equity and gender equality; and we know more can always be done. And we will always be talking about that.

Q: Nanji: So, your budget, you're satisfied that your budget addresses gender equality, as, as it stand - if it's already printed, I guess.

Ah, well, no, the budget has not been printed. And, but we are doing and take steps on gender equity and gender lens in everything that we do - always have been always will continue to.

Q: Smith-Cross: Back to the housing market. Can you be clear on where you stand on the role of speculation in the recent skyrocketing housing crisis in Toronto.

So the high rises of pricing in the marketplace is something that does concern us for - especially for those who are trying to get into the marketplace. And we are going to find ways to address it. And, there's a suite of opportunity - a suite of options that are being presented to us. But, as I said, there's no consensus that what we should be; so we want to make certain that we take the right steps without an unintended consequence with those decisions.

Smith Cross: Just, can you be clear as to what what you believe to be the cause, without, ah -

Sure. The cause is there's an increased demand, and an increase attraction to Ontario: huge job growth; huge economic prosperity; growth into the province, economically, is creating greater demand from all sides. And many of whom are new entrants - new people to come into the city. But we also have a, a need greater evidence from data to determine what degree is occurring, in terms of people wondering how much speculation is in the marketplace; how much is that from non-resident Canadians - were trying to obtain that. And, as I've said, what we are hearing and what we're getting from all sides, is that no one has agreement as to what it should be. We're going to foster strategic approach to this a comprehensive approach.

Q: Smith-Cross: without knowing that, how can you to take measures to cool the housing market or to handle the concern about (inaudible).

We know certain; we know things, right? We know that pricing is going up. We know that demand is high. We know that people want more supply into the mix; and we know that measures may enable us to temper the market - but to what degree it should be done is questionable, and that's what we're trying to find further evidence.

Q: Smith-Cross: When you expect to know?

We're working on it as we speak.

Questions for Minister Sandals:

Q: Ferguson: [Joined in progress] ...quick dirty on (inaudible). Can you explain it, and why didn't someone just put this out last week and save – you know making it a two-day instead of a one-day story?

Oh okay. Well it is true of employers that what is reported is what is actually paid in a calendar year. And it's often the case that a cheque will be cut the following year. That will show in next year's sunshine list. So it isn't that money is getting somehow not accounted for, it's just a simple matter that what is paid out in one calendar year is reported on one year's sunshine list, what is paid out in the next calendar year is paid out on the next year's sunshine list. Nothing has been lost.

Q: Ferguson: Okay, so what was the breakdown? Because we already know it was 1.1 or 1.2 or whatever – so how much more is there?

So what we would – I mean the only record I have is obviously the sunshine list record. I think there are some other issues around the new broader public sector compensation and with the new executive framework for the broader public sector. We have actually eliminated things like signing bonuses, retention bonuses, cash bonuses in lieu of prerequisites. So I understand that in the cases where those things have been negotiating previously as they negotiate into the future, they will drop those things which are no longer allowed.

Q: Jones: So we know the OPG often pays the incentives in the year after that they were earned. Do you know if that's the practice at other major (inaudible) companies?

That would be – it would be quite – well it's quite normal in all sorts of circumstances that something related to one calendar year that the cheque is physically cut in the next calendar year, and that simply means that it will be picked up in the next calendar year's sunshine list. So nothing is going unaccounted for. It's just that the way the whole sunshine list is structured, it's what payments did you receive in this calendar year. And if you actually received the next year, then it will be accounted for next year and that is a common practice and that's why we some of these odd anomalies that things go bouncing up and down one year to the next.

Q: Ferguson: So what do you make of the opposition's criticisms that this is not totally transparent?

I think they're actually grasping at straws. They want us to keep talking about salaries instead of the real issues which is we have a plan to cut salary rates. Sorry, let's do that over again. We have a plan to cut electricity prices and they don't. So they rather we talk about salaries, but the truth is, the real issue is who is going to do what about electricity rates. We have a plan to cut them by 25 per cent. They talked about advertising. That was a diversion tactic. Now they're on to salaries, that's a diversion tactic. The real issue is who is going to cut electricity rates? We are.

Q: Zochodne: What about the pension contribution? That was $460,000 last year. That's a pretty big chunk of change that doesn't show up on the sunshine list either.

That's the way the sunshine list was structured under the original Conservative legislation. So that has been absolutely consistent for absolutely every employer absolutely every year.

Q: Zochodne: The government also commissioned Jim Leitch to do a report on pensions in the electricity sector and found that they couldn't possibly influence rates if they're not brought to heel. Is a $460,000 a year pension contribution something that could be driving up hydro rates then?

Well – I'm not aware that there had been any changes in the pension, so that would not be something that is particularly relevant. As I say, we have set out some new rules for broader public sector that applies across the whole broader public sector and some of the practices that were related to bonuses we will be – will no longer be allowed.

Q: Zochodne: Is the bonuses being scrapped like relocation expensive? I know Mr.(inaudible) had his relocation costs —

I – those would be particular things in an old contract and expenses to relocate are actually pretty normal. (interview ended)

Questions for PC Leader Brown:

(Joined in Progress) In terms of poverty, you know, I'd go back to my four pillars of economic development and how to stimulate job growth. And that was probably outlined a thousand times over the province that cutting red tape, investing in infrastructure, get product to marketplace, affordable energy prices and adjusting the skills mismatch, getting young people into the fields where there is actually jobs. Poverty is a real issue in Ontario.

Q: Jeffords: (inaudible) that shows the prices of Toronto homes has jumped 34% over the last year. What could the government do to help address that?

Well I think it definitely is a real issue in the city of Toronto and frankly the GTA and I think it's even going beyond the GTA. We're just hearing in my own community in Barrie, hearing about the re-sale rate. So when you hear a number that is 1.2 million dollars average home sale, I certainly believe that. I think there's a number of issues. Obviously, you know, the government is looking at the vacant units and will consider their proposals on that. But also the shortage of supply. The reality is there's more demand than there is supply there's more competition for the limited homes that are on the market. And we have a challenge, we have a crisis of affordability in the GTA.

Q: Jones: What do you think should be done on the supply side?

Well, one, I do think there's opportunities to create more supply. I think generally more competition is a good thing. If there's more competition there's more product on the marketplace -- that generally will create more affordable prices. Having said that there's a number of factors that are beyond this government -- interest rate solvency, you know, will play a significant role in the real estate market but we are going to consider the proposals, we understand there's measures that the government is going to put forward. Specifically they have spoken, Charles Sousa's mused about vacant units and we look forward to see what he recommends.

Q: Golding: What do you think the government should be doing to bring the prices down? With prices going up by 33 percent year over year, I mean, it's concerning I think for a lot of people who are trying to get into the market.
Well there's certainly

Well there's certainly an affordability crisis, particularly in a GTA, and it's unique because it's not in all of the provinces not in all of Ontario. You know, I go to communities where you're seeing, frankly, where there's been diminishment in prices. You know I was in Ottawa yesterday where they were telling me a very different story than what we have in Toronto. But it is the crisis here I'm, I'm, and it's a crisis both for rental units and it's for, it's also a crisis for the price of a single family home. I think one, more supply would be helpful. The fact that we have almost record lows of new product available for single family units is an issue. In terms of the rental issue, I worry that the government's speculation is going to cause landlords to immediately jack up rates. This speculation is dangerous and I hope that they would come forward with measures quickly rather than simply speculate causing alarm in the industry.

Q: Golding: Do you think that the government should consider eliminating land transfer tax for first time buyers as a way to help people struggling with affordability?

Well they've actually gone the opposite direction. They've mused about doubling the land transfer tax giving other municipalities the same rate as the city of Toronto. And when they made that suggestion to expand what we have in Toronto elsewhere, we opposed it. I certainly wasn't looking at new forms of taxation.

Q: Zochodne: So for support for increasing supply then, what does that, what does that mean for you? Like you said, mentioned the vacant rate thing, the vacancy as well. But do you also mean like cracking open the green belt or finding new places to grow?

Definitely not going there.

Q: Reporter: How do you increase supply, then? I mean, you're a conservative you believe in the market economy, shouldn't the housing developers be able to figure this out for themselves and respond to the market demand?

First of all, I think it's different issues here. One protecting green space is something we all support. But the red tape, the regulatory burden in getting new product on is well noted. You know, you're hearing about whether it's, you know, three or four year delays at the OMB, that doesn't have the proper resources whether it's the NIMBYism that sometimes you see in the initial municipal process. I'm hearing stories where it's 10 years to get new product on the market and obviously something's changed in the last 15 years. There is a lot less supply. There's more demand and there's a lot less supply and we've seen price escalations like we've never seen before.

Q: Ferguson: Is there much that can be done in the 416 though, where it's already so crowded and there's not a lot of available land? I mean, is it more limited there and are you talking more of 905?

Well first of all I do agree that it is, it is specifically a challenge in the city of Toronto. Obviously it's, the affordability crisis is more intense here. But the reality is, people move and where there is a shortage of supply, it affects everyone. One of the reasons we're seeing escalations up in places like Barrie and Hamilton is because there's no supply right now in the 905. And so the shortage of supply, it's all interrelated. That when there's a shortage of supply in the 905, it also affects the city of Toronto.

Q: Ferguson: So, but there's not much you can do? You think you can do like you're trying to crack the 416 in this next election. So is there anything you can do, is there anything you think you can do in 416 about all these factors or is it kind of tough in 416 because it's already so crowded and there's not a lot of land left?

There's not a lot of land, but the city of Toronto continues its intensification efforts and new supply, whether that is a single family detached unit or whether it's a condo or a rental unit. More supply is good and that applies to the city, too. The burdens of red tape and the regulatory burden in taking 10 years to get new product on the marketplace does affect Toronto as well.

Q: Nanji: Patrick, Cheri DiNovo has a motion today about putting a gender lens on the provincial budget -- are the PCs going to be supporting that?

I think it should be automatic. I think you should, of course.....(recording ended because interview became a one on one).

Questions for NDP Leader Horwath:

[Joined in progress] Ontario. We've seen a growing gap between those at the top and those at the bottom. And it's being exacerbated by things like high child care costs - the highest in the country, here in Ontario. The housing situation is in a crisis. The rental housing situation is having a spillover effect, and now that's in crisis. And all the while this government has done really not very much at all to help people with the affordability of their bills. In fact, they've done the opposite with the hydro crisis that they've created. And so now people are paying hydro bills that they can't afford and don't know what to do next, in terms of where to find, you know, the money to pay for food or pay for the necessities for their families. And so, you know, this situation isn't new. It's one that's been becoming worse and worse here in Ontario. And this government is so out of touch that they haven't recognized where real people are, when it comes to, you know, the quality of life and their ability to build a good life here in Ontario. And that ability to build a good life is eroding at an alarming rate. And this government has not even noticed.

Q. Cruickshank: What type of actions do you want the government to take?

Well, I mean, we've talked to them already about a number of them. We've talked about the childcare situation; that the extremely high cost of child care needs to be addressed. We've talked about the problems that we see in the hydro system, the fact that the rates have jacked up so high. We put a plan forward, actually, to address exactly that; not to foist the costs onto the next generation, but to fix the problems in the system and address the unaffordability of electricity in this province. You know, we talked to today and for the last week about the rule of 1991 construction in rental housing, where units that are built after 1991, you know, those landlords are allowed to raise the rents at whatever amount they want. And that's unacceptable. So we've put that solution forward. The government has done nothing to address those issues.

Q. Golding: Can you talk to us about the latest TREB report and the fact that prices have gone up in the GTA by 33 per cent.

I mean, there's no doubt that there is a crisis. I mean, people are now in the situation, and have been for some time, where they can't even afford to buy a house in the neighbourhood that they grew up in. And that crisis in the housing market is spilling over to the rental market. And so, you know, we have people who are being evicted because their landlords are jacking their rents up by double. Folks are not getting wage increases that are double. They are not getting salary increases that are double. And so it puts everybody into a crisis. The government has known this was coming down the pike for some time now and they've done nothing to resolve to resolve either of those issues: the housing crisis or the rental (inaudible).

Q. Golding: What do you suggest the government do in terms of the housing market thought? If prices go up so high, people keep talking about a bubble and that can have disastrous consequences. So what do you think the government should be doing to bring those prices down or bring them under control?

Well, I'll tell you what I wouldn't do. I wouldn't sit on on my hands for months and months and months and do absolutely nothing, which is what this government (inaudible). Look, the Minister says they are coming up at some point with a suite of options. Well, guess what, people are getting kicked out of their suites right now, while we wait for the government to come up with a solution.

Q: What would you do?

Well, look, we haven't put together the details of our platform, but we certainly will be addressing affordability issues. We've been identifying for years now that there's a crisis of affordability in this province. And whether it's the housing market, in terms of purchasing of homes, whether it's a rental market in terms of people being able to afford the rent, whether it's their hydro bill, whether it's their child care. There's a reason why the study that came out just showed that young people particularly in a situation where they are not able to have a quality of life that they should expect to be able to have. They are particularly, you know, in a situation where they have to put off some of the major life decisions that they would normally make as a young person, as young persons: buying of a house; starting of a family. You know, those kinds of decisions are now being extended because they simply can't afford to live here in the GTA.

Q. Smith Cross: Where do you stand on the idea of a foreign buyers' tax?

Well, I mean, I think that's one of the things that has to be looked at, absolutely. But I don't think there's, there's, you know, one panacea that's going to solve all the problems. But certainly this government has known that this crisis has been building for months and months and months. In fact, the Finance Minister dealt with it or talked about it back in November. Now we're in a situation where, you know, the house prices have gone up by 33 per cent in one year. That's a serious problem. And certainly the government needs to move.

Q. Smith Cross: What should the government do to manage the (inaudible) of the housing market?

Well, again, there are a number of things that the government needs to do. But what they are doing is taking their sweet time, while people are in crisis, and that's very, very worrisome.

Q. Jeffords: On Peter Tabuns' private member's bill, do you think that if the government just adopted this, it would cut down on speculation or reaction from landlords who are raising rents.

Well, we're quite worried. I mean the government's not moving fast enough on this issue. They talk about having a number of different things they want to do when it comes to the rental market. But one of the things that has to be done right away is that 1991 loophole needs to be closed. Because the longer they drag their feet, the more likelihood that tenants are going to be at risk for these huge increases of doubling or more of their rent, which nobody can afford. And that shows how out of touch this government is. This is a real threat to people. This is a real problem for tenants who are in buildings post-1991, that were constructed post-1991. And for the government just simply say, 'well, we're going to get around to it,' that's not good enough. A first initial step that would make a huge difference to prevent further, you know, speculation or further increases in rent, so landlords might be able to get in under the wire, if you will, is necessary. I mean, it has to happen. And that this government doesn't realize that it needs to happen right away is shocking. And it just once again shows how out of touch they are with what tenants are facing here in Ontario.

Q. Crawley: (Inaudible) Are you advocating for some sort of interference in what is essentially a market economy?

Well, look, that's the same question as for rental housing. I mean it's really clear that if you're going to build a cohesive society, we have to have a place for people to live. And that means you have to look at all kinds of housing, whether it's rental housing, whether it is market housing...like housing purchases, or whether it's affordable housing, frankly. And on none of those fronts has this government done anything. Affordable doesn't exist for folks that they can't afford to rent in this, in this (inaudible) rental market. People can't afford to live in the neighborhood that they grew up in, in terms of the housing market. So, you know, we have a crisis on all front, and it doesn't look like this Liberal government has been taking action at all, which is a serious problem because it's real people whose lives are being affected in serious around this. I mean people want to live in Toronto. They want to work in Toronto. But they can't do that because of the way that the markets (inaudible).

Q. Crawley: I hear what you want to do on rent control. But I'm still not hearing anything from you about what you would actually want the government to do to rein in sales prices. And what could they possibly do?

I mean there are, there are a number of different things for sure. What I wouldn't do if I was this government is wait for years to go by as this crisis builds and builds and builds, and take no action.

Q. Crawley: But what are those number of things, Andrea? What one tangible thing the government could do to rein in the increase in house sales prices?

Again, I mean, there are a number of issues that are being discussed right now. What I would, what I would, you know, commit to is that when we put our platform together, the NDP will be putting a number of ideas forward to deal with the affordability of housing, to deal with the affordability of rentals, to deal with the fact that there's folks that are at the lower end in the market that need affordable housing. All of those things have to be addressed.

N.B.: Comments captured are not verbatim quotes

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