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Subject: MEDIA EVENT: MINISTERS' PRE-CAUCUS SCRUMS

Attachments: April 11 -Ministers' Pre-Cabinet Scrums.doc

Energy related content highlighted

MEDIA EVENT: MINISTERS' PRE-CAUCUS SCRUMS

April 11, 2017

Location:

Outside Cabinet Meeting Room, Legislature

Speakers:

Ministers Sousa; Ballard; Hoskins; Smith; Naqvi; Flynn; Thibeault: PC MPP Jones; NDP MPP Tabuns

Media Attendance:

Print – 11

TV – 5

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; Lamoureux - Radio Canada TV; Global; ; Bliss - CTV Ontario; Rath - CHCH Television; Tumelty - City TV; Wu – Fairchild TV; Cruickshank – iPolitics

Media Questions:

Questions for Minister Sousa:

Q: Benzie: (Joined in progress) ...on housing affordability?

I've been trying. You know I wanted to say that we would be happy to meet, the sooner the better. We are still waiting to hear back in terms of confirmation as to when it's best for them.

Q: Benzie: So do want to do it before or after the April 27th budget?

Well I would like to do it before I table the budget in the spring but we'll see. We'll see how it works out.

Q: Benzie: And housing affordability is obviously a big part of that budget, measures to make housing more affordable, whether it's renting or buying. Is there anything you can say to assure people that you're going to take some action, whether you're renting a house or whether you're buying a house?

And we're going to be taking action on the housing affordability issue soon. And so if I have an opportunity to have the meeting, it will be advantageous for us to proceed forward but it's too urgent a matter as it stands now. A lot of talk has been had. We've been having consultations with stakeholders across the system; be it developers; be it homebuyers; be it the associations; where we deal with economists. We've been dealing with other practices in other parts of the country, all of which is informing us as to what to do next and we are coming out with something shortly.

Q: Rath: The mayor and regional chair of Niagara Falls say it's not too late to stop this RFP process. It is deeply flawed and needs to be changed>

So the RFP process and the whole RPQ is keeping with everything else we do with modernization and the OLG. We try to enhance and provide them with jobs, with security for the Niagara Region. We continue to support tourism. We've increased our hosting fees; we provided for a new entertainment complex which is going to continue to drive value for the region. And we're doing this; let's be clear; we're doing this because Council has asked us to do so. They were not part of our modernization strategy. I mean they have two casinos that are being and effectively running. Give the fact that we're now modernizing in other parts of the region they felt concerned and appropriate for them to be part of it at their request. We broke the contract. We proceeded now to modernize. We have advanced the cause. And we have dealt and deliberated over this with the mayor and others. Now they are at a point where they can appreciate and have discussions with proponents who are going to be, but the privacy commissioner and the integrity commissioner prohibits us from being involved. And I won't be discussing that process of the RFP. Nor should they but they should be involved as we proceed

forward for the benefit of Niagara. Don't put in harm's way the very thing that they're trying and asked us to do which is to enhance and improve the region.

Q: They say that it should have been a sale because a 20-year lease won't attract big players. They are not going to put money in...

So here you go again. They're interfering with the process of a competitive process to benefit Niagara. They're competing against the other regions including in their minds, I think Woodbine. I think they have stated that. I have taken action to enable them to be better off. Niagara is a destination of choice. The unemployment rate is reducing; we are injecting more support. We have a lot that we're going to continue to support and do for Niagara because we value the work the region, the tourism, we'll continue to do our part. I hope that mayor and the regional chair...I take exception to for what he said on the radio by the way. They should stand with the province to benefit the region and we'll do our part.

Q: Rath: So they say this will suck more money out of the region.

The province is giving them more money. We've doubled our host fees, we're providing for the entertainment complex, we already made commitments that will be doing more in health care in the hospitals, We're providing for support for the Jobs for Prosperity Fund where you want to attract even more investment. The chair himself has said Niagara is booming, the economy is growing because the province has been participating and aligned with the region. We will continue to do our part.

Q: Rath: Have I missed anything with this?

I want to see Niagara do well. And I want to see the members of Niagara, who represent the people of Niagara, he is right here, right now. He knows that we care about the well-being of Niagara and the entire industry. Education, Agrifood processing, the wine industry, the tourist industry, it's a great destination. We want to make it even better.

Q: Smith-Cross: On housing what are you expecting from the mayors tomorrow?

Well I'm hoping that we'll have a discussion about the number of offers that are available to us and before us. We don't want to make decisions that will have unintended consequences. But at the same time something has to be made. We've already started to address the supply side. We're making advancements with growth plan and we're trying to get more supplies into the mix but the demand is tremendous. And it's a symptom of the growing economy of Ontario and the growth and the destination of choice, to come into the region, especially in Toronto. So, we're looking at the demand and consequences. I want to go after those scalpers, who I call probably scalpers, looking at taking advantage of speculation in the marketplace. We need to curb that activity. I've asked Minister Morneau to close a loophole where they come in, take assignment on paper, and take capital gains when in fact they should be taking a cut and paying for it.

Q: Benzie: But he didn't do that in the budget.

Well we're going to move forward and try to provide supports in that regard, and we'll see what takes place.

Q: Smith-Cross: Do you have any options to increase the tax?

Well, I think Tory has already indicated, as others, there's vacancies in the city, and you know, how do we address that. That's limiting supply. So, I'm just taking all the under consideration.

Q: Benzie: And the foreign buyers taxes still on the table?

All things being considered.

Q: Smith-Cross: Can you describe the property scalping?

So, I've had a lot discussions with a lot of developers. And hundreds of properties have come into a new subdivision, and planned for build. They get sold within hours. The buyers, oftentimes, are a few who come every time. They'll buy and scoop up a slew of properties, hold them and take assignments on those properties. When they're built, they sell a tremendous profit and the tail end. They're crowding out families, who actually want to buy and in the end they make their cut. That's totally legit. But I don't think they should be getting exemptions or capital gains from doing so. They should be paying full freight and that's the loophole I've asked the minister to close.

Q: Smith-Cross: Who are these people?

They're speculators and investors and that's all good. I have no issue with that. But if they're not owning a home and not residing in the residence, if they're not taking advantage of it and crowding people out who'd like to, there are families who want to have the dream of homeownership so they can raise their kids. I got three kids of my own. They're young adults. I worry like everybody else that they're going to have a hard time getting into the market. There's very few starter homes available.

Q: Smith-Cross: For these property scalpers in the market, are they in infrastructure, or the construction business or

Make no mistake, I encourage people to invest in properties, to develop properties to provide for rental properties and to hold on. We need that. I'm just saying, if you're going to take and flip property and get exemptions on capital gains, when you've never done a thing to advance it or to provide support for it, then you should pay full tax on that.

Q: Nanji: Can you speak to the data you have about this phenomena? I know you've talked to developers. Is there any other data (Inaudible).

So, we have, I mean, we're getting data all the time. And as we proceed forward we're trying to tabulate who the buyers are, the purpose of the use of the property where they're originating from, are they residing- those things are already being developed. We're getting a lot of that still, continue to have discussions with the city and the Federal government. They have already started to invest more in Stats Canada and to support and achieve greater integrity in that data going forward.

Q: Nanji: Minister, are these the last two meetings with the mayors and the chairs and the Federal government before we start to see your actual relief the package?

So I think, you know that the Premier has been in meetings with mayors in the region to look at the issue. And we want everybody to be aware of the plan, the growth plan, as well as some of the options that are being made available. How we can work with the municipalities to expedite and permit some of the properties to come on stream to foster greater supply. And then after that we'll be making decisions soon.

Q: Smith-Cross: Are you read to release any of that data about this property scalping?

We'll be releasing a comprehensive review, a report, a whole package and in the coming short moments and we'll go from there.

Q: Smith Cross: Where is this happening? In Toronto, in the GTAH? What developments?

And again that's part of the decision. Right? Because the implications of the decision we make, the unintended consequences will affect other parts of the region. So I'm being very cautious and deliberate in my responses today. I want to make certain we it complete before we come forward.

Questions for Minister Ballard:

Q: Benzie: Minister, you are going to have some news for us in the next day or two on what you're planning on doing or are you going to share it with the mayors or is the Premier going to share it with the mayors tomorrow what the government's plans are for making housing more affordable in the Greater Toronto Area?

Well in terms of the package we're bringing forward that, that will be, that will be coming soon. Tomorrow's the meeting with the mayors and chairs will be one of our ongoing meetings we have. This one is focused on affordable housing across the GTHA. It's something we do regularly with the chairs and with our mayors across the area to talk to them about important issues and this one we are focusing on housing.

Q: Reporter: What are you hoping to learn from the mayors?

Well there's the, the, the, all the sectors, all the sectors have talked to us about what they see as some of the problems and some of the solutions and we want to hear from our municipal partners what they see as some of the issues to more affordable housing.

Q: Reporter: (inaudible) pretty good idea already of what those are, you've been working on this file for a long time.

We have, we, we have been working on this file for a long time but it's always good to sit down with the individuals and hear directly from them about what they think the issues are and what they think the solutions are.

Q: Benzie: Now some of the mayors don't want to see, for example, a foreign buyers tax because they're concerned that that might send a signal that their city is not a good place for investment, for foreign investment. I mean there's not really going to be a one size fits all solution that you can have for, for say Toronto and say Hamilton at the same time -- is there?

Well, you know we've done a number of things already in terms of secondary suites, inclusionary zoning that isn't one size fits all. It's up to the municipalities, our municipal partners to put in play. So I think tomorrow we want to talk at somewhat high levels about what the issues are in municipalities across the GTHA. What are some of the things that we may consider, maybe considering, get their direct feedback.

Q: Reporter: Are you going to be giving the mayors any more of a specific time line on a decision, other than soon?

I think we'll say very soon. Very soon.

Q: Benzie: Does very soon mean in the next week or two or does it mean in the next month or two?

You're going to have to stay tuned.

Q: Benzie: Would it be in the budget, these measures would budget?

It will be soon.

Q: Benzie: Do you have anything more that you could actually share with us, Chris?
Not too much more

Not too much more to add, other than it will be a robust package that will expand on rent controls.

Q: Reporter:another question about the quality of homes being built. We know that in a rush of homes being built, sometimes quality is just not there and people are forced to move into houses that need substantial amount of repairs as a result of poor quality. What do you have to say to those people?

Well I think I think first and foremost that's really a question to Tarion which, which insures new built homes to make sure that they are up to a good quality move in. Municipalities, as well, are the ones that oversee the construction of those homes. So I think there's two bodies that they need to deal with right off the bat.

Q: Reporter: (Inaudible) about quality of home construction

...you do have to meet the building code that's enforced by our municipal partners.

Questions for Minister Hoskins:

(Joined in progress) And responsible for ensuring they adhere to and implement all aspects of the French Language Services Act. There are a number of, and of course we have the (inaudible) as well. There are a number of health services providers that are designated French language service. There are, I think you're talking about the ones that are identified.....

Q: Lamoureux: The ones that are identified because designated, that's something else but identified, and apparently there's a lot of, it's according to the goodwill of the people but the regulation 284-11 is not always enforced and there's no accountability, this is what he is saying....

Well I mean, first of all, so we expect our LHINS, I mean this is about ensuring access to French language services for Ontarians. And that's the starting point. And so I've met with the commissioner to discuss this. We're working with the commissioner on this specific issue as well as I'm getting the advice from my French language health services advisory council on how we can address this in a better way. So I'm confident that through those discussions, and maybe we need to look at things a little different than we have in the past, that's something that I'm prepared to look at. At the end of the day, I want to, I want to have confidence that Franco-Ontarians, that those that choose and have the right to receive their health services in their native language or in the French language, that they are able to access the services. So I really appreciate the fact that the commissioner has raised this with me directly and that we're working very closely to try to.

Q: Lamoureux: And he's been raising this for at least since 2011 there was a three year period that you know, those that were already offering services could adapt until 2014, and he says there are still problems. How come it takes so long to make sure that the regulation is respected?

Well I think it's partly because we have to, so there are responsibilities under the act, of course, as I mentioned the difference between the designated as well as our relationship with the six entities that the LHINS have a relationship with this particular category. That's part of the reason why I suggested that we may need to look at this in a slightly different fashion than we have in the past. But I think even the commissioner, if you were to ask him I think that he, I would hope that, I believe that he would say that there is a very good working relationship between my office, myself and the commissioner including on this issue, a variety of issues actually, and this is an important one for me to resolve to his satisfaction and the satisfaction of Franco-Ontarians.

Q: Lamoureux: But is acceptable what's on the ground, the services that are offered to francophones? Are you satisfied with what is in place now?

Well I think, you know, I think we can always continue to do better, and so I think that's what this conversation is about.

Questions for MPP Smith: Q. Ferguson: (joined in progress) that note in the House, Mr. Freezie or whatever it was, what's the company called?

Kisko.

Q. Ferguson: Kisko Freezies?

Kisko Freezies, Mr. Freeze.

Q. Ferguson: Where are they?

They're in Woodbridge, yeah. So, you know, they're disappointed on a couple of fronts. First of all, the minister in the House last week during Question Period said that this company actually did qualify for the ICI program. This company has checked. They don't qualify for the ICI program, which is one strike against the minister. The second strike is the fact that he actually disclosed in the Legislature how much electricity that this company was using without having the company's permission to do so. So I know that the owner had some question about whether that was, you know, the appropriate thing for the minister to do. I certainly had the same question and that's why we've written to the commissioner to find out whether or not there have been any rules that have been broken here by the minister.

Q. Ferguson: The minister was just telling us that companies that don't qualify for the other 25 per cent or the ICI could get a – between a two and four per cent –

Yes.

Q. Ferguson: (inaudible) because that's how much that they save by taking the social programs off the rate base.

Exactly. Yeah.

Q. Ferguson: That doesn't go that far as –

No, it doesn't go very far at all, and that was what was said by the manufacturers who were with me today in my press conference. Basically what they're saying is with the rising costs of electricity in Ontario, two to four per cent is a rounding error on their monthly electricity bill. So the government has never said that they were going to address the real reason why electricity prices are soaring the way they are. They're just basically deferring the price over a longer period of time, and so, you know, there are some serious, serious concerns from manufacturers out there, small- and medium-sized employers who don't qualify for any of these relief programs.

Q. Zochodne: Also came up – and the minister said that there's like a director who's filling in for the ombudsman at Hydro One despite the fact that it says in legislation that privatized Hydro One, they need to have an ombudsman. So are the Liberals kind of shirking their own law on this?

It's odd to me that nothing was ever said about the fact that the ombudsman of Hydro One had vacated her position and Mr. Clark brought it up today because it is an accountability issue for the government. This is a company that has some serious, serious complaints surrounding their practices over the last several years, and to not have an ombudsman in

place for a month without telling anyone is a bit concerning for us and it should be for the people of Ontario, especially Hydro One customers.

Q. Zochodne: Do you think that complaints are going unheard because there's not a full-time ombudsman in that role?

It's hard to know. You know, the minister did say that there are still staff over in the ombudsman's office, but the secrecy around her departure makes us question what's actually happening in that office. And as I say, this is one of the biggest concerns for the people of Ontario right now is their electricity bills and if they don't have somebody to turn to, clearly they're turning to the official opposition to bring up their concerns in the Legislature.

Questions for Minister Naqvi:

Q:

(joined in progress) We have been working very actively and effectively with our partners in the justice system, the judiciary, the Crown, the defence bar, and our court staff, in making sure that our cases move in expeditious manner. That is why also last December we announced new resources such as 13 new judges in the Ontario Court of Justice, 36 new Crown attorneys, (inaudible) new defence counsel through Legal Aid Ontario, and court staff, so that we can speed up the criminal justice system. We are also reforming our bail system through our bail action plan to make those important structural changes. But we've also asked the federal government to come to the table to make sure that they fill their vacancies within the Superior Court of Justice and then also bring forward a federal, provincial, and territorial meeting looking at just the issue of delays so that we can really engage in a conversation around bold reforms to Criminal Code such as eliminating the preliminary inquiries in certain cases so that we can make important structural and procedural changes to the Criminal Code of Canada.

Q. Unidentified: But why should people feel safe? Because clearly (inaudible) guilty of some pretty heinous crimes are being released on technicalities. Why should people –

Well, no, no. We have to remember an accused person is innocent until proven guilty so until and unless they've been proven guilty in the court by a judge, we cannot assume that they – they are. But, you know, I want to – I want Ontarians to know that we are very much focused on ensuring that we live in a secure – in a secure society. That is why we're taking this issue very seriously. That is why we're making very important investments by hiring 13 additional judges, by hiring more Crown and defence counsels, by making changes to our bail system, so that we unclog our – our judicial system and make sure that we – that community safety remains the number-one concern.

Questions for Minister Flynn:

Q. Nanji: (joined in progress) (inaudible)

Well certainly I think we know, I think we understand that pay transparency is a part of the solution for sure; that the more information we have out there, the more that (inaudible) shine some sunlight on something, the more we're able to deal with it. (Inaudible) in the past it was considered poor form if you told somebody how much you made and those days are gone, hopefully, and we should all know – and especially in the public service, how much are, you know, how much people are being paid. (Inaudible) I'm – I want to look at the bill. (Inaudible) to come forward. Certainly I appreciate the advocacy of the Equal Pay Coalition. They've been – they've held all three parties' feet to the fire on this issue. I agree with them that the progress to date has been too slow. And that's exactly why we're looking at it in a strategic way, why we had the – why we're putting the working group in place to build on the work of the steering committee (inaudible). I mean, I'm – I'm really expecting to make some very – some systematic progress on the issue. And the Equal Pay Coalition is a part of that group, and I expect they'll be a very vocal part of that group.

Q. Nanji: In terms of your working group, I think there's been five meetings scheduled up until September and then none after that. I mean, do you think that's enough to do the type of in-depth work that you say the working group should be doing at this point?

Well, we've got (inaudible) as our facilitator. She came very, very highly recommended. I think she's (inaudible) respect of the group. If she feels that some changes should be made along the way, I have met with (inaudible) about the schedule. I asked her what she thought of the schedule. She seems to think that it's doable. And the committee members feel that there should be meetings in between meetings, (inaudible) sub-committees should be formed, that type of thing. I'm certainly open to that. I just want to make sure that the process is – that is used brings us to the right result. We've been able to move the yardsticks by six per cent, which isn't a lot in 30 years. It's time we accelerated that progress. I'm looking forward to this group doing exactly that.

Q. Nanji: What's the hold-up been up until now? You guys have the steering committee. You know, this working group was set up in November I think and the first meeting's not happening until this week. So what's taking so long?

Well, it was the appointment of the facilitator. Obviously (inaudible) out to find the right person. We ensured that that was done. The formation of the group took some time. We wanted to make sure we were talking to the right people. The formation of the group actually has changed since it was – since it was first considered. So we've actually have added some people to the group. It was originally envisioned as being a 16-member group. It's grown to 18 right now. We've got the right facilitator on the group. I just want to make sure we do it right. This is one of those issues that often you only get the one chance to get it right, and then for some reason if it's not done it slides – you know, it slides off the agenda. This is an opportunity we have to get this right. When I talk to younger people, especially the younger women, they think this is an issue we've solved already. I don't think it's until they get [end audio]

Questions for Minister Thibeault:

Q. Jones: Director and ombudsman?

So while...so the ombudsman has resigned. She moved on to another job, just like other people, you know, find other jobs. And in the search process, Sophie Petrillo is now the acting director for the ombudsman office, while they are looking they are looking for an ombudsman.

Q. Zochodne: You made it so that Hydro One had to have an ombudsman to (inaudible) calm people's concerns when you privatized it, that the...Ontario's ombudsman is going to oversee it. So I mean, like, are those concerns being met now that there is just some interim person who probably has other work on their plate as well?

All issues relating to the Hydro One ombudsman's office will be dealt with appropriately by the director. And while we're searching for...while Hydro One is searching for a new ombudsman, they will have...ensure that all actions are taken. And, you know, we hope that Hydro One has a new ombudsman in place, as soon as possible.

Q. Zochodne: How long do they have to search?

As I'm saying, you know, from my understanding, we want to do this as soon as possible. And the acting director is filling all of those. So, you know what, the timeframe is making sure you get the right person and not just a warm body. Fiona Crean did some great work. And her last meeting with me was talking about how she was pleased that the company was turning things around, when it comes to customer care. And, you know, we'll see that ombudsman in place, as soon as Hydro One can get that new ombudsman hired.

Q. Jones: What are you telling the manufacturers who are too big to qualify for the 17 per cent cut, but are too small to qualify even for the expanded ICI?

So, you know, I've met with some of the manufacturing companies that are out there. Many of the manufacturing companies are now going to qualify. Under the Class B component, we're looking at about 50,000 that fall in that. When we change it, thousands more will qualify. So there will be a four per cent reduction, you know, between a two and four per cent reduction for many of these facilities that won't qualify for either. And while I know that is modest, there are the Save on Energy programs that they can utilize as well; and we're encouraging that. But we're going to continue to meet with them and talk with them to make sure that if there are other things that we can do, we'll look at that. But overall right now, the Fair Hydro Plan is helping significant amount of Ontario businesses with 500,000 going to qualify on the Fair Hydro Plan, and then with the ICI threshold as well dropping to 500 kilowatts.

Q. Jones: Are there more rate and bill reduction measures that you are looking at for that group of mid-range manufacturers?

So right now, what we're continuing to do is look at the long-term energy plan. So, you know, part of the Fair Hydro Plan is actually working in conjunction with the long-term energy plan. Some of the concerns that many of these manufacturers are bringing forward, as well, is the, you know, the Climate Change Action Plan. The two plans I've mentioned, the LTEP and the CCAP need to be hand in glove, and we're going to talk with them about that. But looking at what we're doing and pulling out costs through market reform, for example, that will also have a benefit for many of these kind of stuck-in-the-middle manufacturing companies, which will also have a benefit to them, as we continue to find ways to reduce those costs. It is something that the ministry is well aware of. And it is something that we are continuing to work with this sector on, to ensure that if they have any other concerns that are addressed.

Q. Jones: Those benefits sounds like very, sort of, in the future, long-term benefits, rather than the immediate relief that the residential and small businesses will receive this summer. Is that, you know, is that enough to help the manufacturers deal with their high hydro bills?

So, again, right, so the four per cent reduction can be significant for many of those because when you're talking about if you are 400 kilowatts, that's still a significant reduction. And I get it's modest for many of them. So I understand that. But when you start working with the Save on Energy program through your utility, you can actually see significant savings from changing your lights. And I know that's some low hanging fruit that many of them have already done, but others haven't. And they don't know where to go. And so that's why we've signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce to talk about the programs that we currently have in place, like the ICI programs that some will qualify for. But the other ones that they don't...that don't qualify, there are programs in place to help them. And we are going to work with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce to get that message out because we need to do that. We need to do a better job. The government needs to do a better job of getting that message out to let them know that there are programs there to help.

Q. Jones: So does the two to four per cent just come from shifting the social programs over...?

Yes. Yeah, so it's...when you take, when you take the social programs off of the rate base and put it onto the tax base, that will vary between two to four per cent, depending on what type of business they operate. And that's where that savings comes from.

Q. Zochodne: So are you (inaudible) Chamber of Commerce to promote your (inaudible) policies?

No. We're actually working with the Chamber through the memorandum of understanding, just to help promote all of the programs that are out there.

Q. Zochodne: So they are just doing it because (inaudible)?

Well, and...well because, you know, the Chamber has a lot of members and they, you know, their role and mandate is to help their membership continue to grow and, you know, and learn about programs that actually help them. And this...programs that we have in place are part of that.

Q. Zochodne: Industrial conservation issues are a really complicated thing. Is there not just a simpler way to help these manufacturers?

If there was, we'd be doing it, right. And part of looking at the ICI program, it is the smartest and most successful way to actually help many of our businesses. And so, you know, we're going to continue to move forward with the ICI program. And with the ICI program, the Industrial Conservation Initiative, you have to work with your local utility to qualify for this, to know how you get in, you know, how you qualify for this. So it also encourages these utilities to work with their local utility, to get on the ICI program, but to also look at what other programs are in place. The Save on Energy program has an energy manager component that will help many businesses that many of these utilities will pay for. So, you know, let's look at all opportunities that are there because conservation does actually help these businesses save money in the long run.

Q. Zochodne: So is it complicated and it has to be complicated because the electricity system now is such a complicated mess that any program that helps people has to be somewhere along those lines to fix all those problems?

Well, no. It's part of energy usage, you know. You can't say that one specific thing is going to help every single business with every single business in this province uses energy differently. So the utilities are the ones that are best working with the companies to actually tell them how they can best utilize the savings in the programs that are in place to actually help all of our companies in the province. Thanks everyone. Have a great day.

Questions for PC MPP Jones:

Q: And you would like the staff, the trustees, to reimburse the expenses?

Yes. Yeah. If they can't show that there is a direct relationship between why they went to Hawaii and children in the classroom in York Region, I think it's time to repay the taxpayer funded travel agent called the York Region Board.

Q: And in terms of some of the other issues this investigation is trying to address as far as the allegations of systemic racism, what would you like to see done there?

Look, clearly there is a problem at the York Board. I am looking forward to the report being released so that we can see just how far it goes and how deep it goes in. Clearly there are problems and they need to be dealt with. The first step, the easy first step, is a moratorium on trustee travel.

Q: Do you have any specific request though as far as the allegations of racism and how to deal with the discrimination issues?

I actually want to see the report when it's released. I believe it's coming out this afternoon and hopefully that will give the government some direction and immediate action needs to be taken.

Questions for NDP MPP Tabuns:

Q. Jones: (Inaudible) obviously you've been calling on them to help residential customers with their bills. Why is it also important to help the manufacturers?

Because we need jobs. I mean, we need jobs in Ontario. Having a healthy manufacturing sector is critical to the economic health of Ontario. And the fact that the Liberals have ignored them - aren't dealing with the bigger structural problem, aren't dealing with privatization - just says they are not interested.

Q. Jones: They'll still get two to four per cent reduction on their bills, the government says.

Yeah, they say that. We'll see what actually happens when the plan comes out. But because the Liberals aren't willing to deal with the larger structural problems, they aren't going to deal with the large elements that have been driving prices going up. They can borrow as much money as they want; if they don't deal with the privatization, we're going to see the bills erupt in the future.

Q. Zochodne: Hydro One doesn't have a full time ombudsman right now. Does that mean that there's a bunch of complaints that aren't being heard?

I'm sure. I'm sure. They don't have an ombudsman. This is something that could be corrected easily; restore the authority of Ontario's ombudsman to this corporation. Give Ontarians the protection they deserve. No one should be surprised that this company is not that interested in what is going on with their customers. It's been setup to make money. It's been setup to make investors happy. Again, if they want to have an ombudsman, Ontario's got a great one. That ombudsman should be brought back into the picture and given jurisdiction.

Q. Zochodne: Is this and the \$4.5 million compensation that the Hydro CEO now receives, is just kind of further proof that the government doesn't really control what goes on at Hydro anymore?

Yeah...well, I would say that their ability to control the corporation is very limited. They have shown that they are not willing to take on the big issues, like compensation. They are not willing to make sure that customers are protected. Their whole goal in this, really, was to look after themselves. They needed the money to deal with the budget deficit. They are getting that money. The rest of it really doesn't matter.

Q. Zochodne: So the Premier is having a meeting tomorrow with the mayors and chairs and we're getting, you know....first of all, what is your definition of soon? What does "soon" mean to you?

(Inaudible) Soon means...soon is just so indefinite and vague. This is a government that could have acted on housing anytime in the last few years. A few weeks ago, I brought forward a bill to deal with buildings that are exempt from rent control. They had an opportunity to act immediately. They are not. Soon, in many ways, seems to me to just be pushing off the problem. They've got political difficulties. They don't want to actually act, so they are holding a meeting. They are saying soon. They should be acting now. They can act now.

N.B.: Comments captured are not verbatim quotes

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