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ONTARIO LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

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WEEKLY ROUNDUP

WEST COAST OFFENCE – British Columbia is a very different place than Ontario, but elections there are closely watched in this part of the country. And the bottom line from this week's B.C. vote is that the Liberals are still in power, after 16 often tumultuous years and low popularity some pundits were convinced had doomed them to defeat. (Sound familiar?) It's a razor thin Liberal minority – just two seats more than the Opposition NDP, with the three seats won by the Green Party giving them the balance of power, a scenario very unlikely to be replicated in Ontario – and it's not official yet, as judicial recounts in close ridings could swing the results. But the fact that beleaguered B.C. Liberal Leader **Christy Clark** is still Premier today provides a glimmer of hope to Ontario Grits wondering if they can ever get voters back on side here. It was also a reminder, for everybody, about the sheer unpredictability of elections these days.

REPAIRING HER IMAGE – B.C. is ostensibly a two-party race, and in recent years Ontario elections have had a similar feel, with lacklustre NDP campaigns leaving the Liberals and PCs to duke it out. Now, Ontario NDP Leader **Andrea Horwath** is serving notice she won't be a bystander this time around, continuing to amp up her profile with policy commitments. This week it was a vow to pay a third of the costs for municipalities' social housing repairs – much to the apparent delight of influential Toronto Mayor **John Tory**. Shots of Horwath making her announcement with a smiling Tory behind her were a major coup, reinforced when Tory publicly thanked her and said he'd use her pledge to try and get similar commitments from the other parties.

EVERYBODY SINGH – Whatever momentum Horwath may be gaining, she will endure something of a setback as her Deputy Leader **Jagmeet Singh** runs for the federal NDP leadership. Singh will reportedly launch his campaign on Monday, although it's not clear yet whether stepping down from his Bramalea-Gore-Malton seat will be part of the equation. Technically he doesn't have to, but his team probably won't like the optics of him being an absentee MPP while he runs federally.

BY LINES – If Singh does resign provincially, it would create another Legislature vacancy before the previous one is filled. This would be nothing new, in that Ontario has been in almost continuous by-election mode for years – including the campaign in Sault Ste. Marie happening right now. All three party leaders focused on the Soo this week as the June 1 by-election contest heated up. Premier **Kathleen Wynne** dropped by to show her support for the Liberal candidate, but was careful to manage expectations lest her party lose a seat that has been theirs since 2003. "I think by-elections are always very tough for government, you know," Wynne cautiously told reporters. "Obviously, the people of Sault Ste. Marie will decide, but I'm not going to make any predictions." Adding to her discomfort, both Horwath and PC Leader **Patrick Brown** publicly challenged Wynne to a leaders' debate in Sault

Ste. Marie. Not surprisingly Wynne declined, arguing that she faces off against them often enough during Question Period.

PAT ANSWERS – It was two years ago this week that Brown pulled off his stunning upset to win the PC Leadership. Determined to rain on his parade, the Liberals issued a missive noting another anniversary: Three years ago this week, in Barrie during the 2014 election, then-PC Leader **Tim Hudak** made his ill-fated pledge to fire 100,000 civil servants – a promise widely attributed as scuttling his campaign. But the LIBs are long past bashing Hudak, and the real point of their invective was this: “The man who hosted that event at that country club is none other than the Conservatives’ new leader, Patrick Brown.” Brown, for his part, took a step toward countering the main thrust of Liberal attacks, which is that he has no policies. While not exactly earth-shaking – Brown continues to defer serious policy discussions until a party conference in November – he used an Opposition Day motion in the House to unveil an eight-point “accountability and ethics action plan.” Mostly it’s a re-hash of vows made in the wake of Liberal controversies, such as forbidding cabinet ministers from having fundraising targets, restoring the Auditor General’s full oversight of government advertising, and requiring ministers named in a police investigation to temporarily step aside until their name is cleared of any wrongdoing. Despite this being the first concrete policy planks Brown has released, he evidently didn’t expect to make much of a splash – the Tories didn’t even post anything about it on their website.

DOCS HAWKS – Brown has made no secret of his support for the province’s doctors in their ongoing contract feud with the province, and it looks like he will have plenty of opportunity to show that support as the fight escalates. At the same time as Health Minister **Eric Hoskins** was expressing optimism about the two sides getting closer on the critical issue of binding arbitration, the Ontario Medical Association was installing an unabashedly hawkish executive. **Shawn Whatley** is the OMA’s new President, while **Nadia Alam** is President-Elect (taking over the top spot next spring). Both have been vocal hardliners in the contract dispute, and Whatley didn’t mince words in the news release announcing his election. “For the past three years, doctors have been disrespected and vilified by the government,” Whatley stated. “The government has knowingly underfunded patient care and has been able to do so because doctors pay for a significant part of our health-care infrastructure – this is inappropriate and unsustainable.”

IN THE HOUSE

- Energy Minister **Glenn Thibeault** introduced Bill 132, the *Fair Hydro Act*, to reduce electricity rates by an average of 25% for all residential customers.
- Two government bills passed Third Reading: Bill 39 – the longest-outstanding government legislation on the Order Paper, introduced last October – amending legislation to modernize the *Mining Act*; and Bill 84, clarifying provincial rules around medically assisted death.

FOR THE RECORD

“We’ve had hundreds of briefings with hundreds of documents ... I can’t comment on one graph when we’ve been looking at hundreds of scenarios.”

- Energy Minister **Glenn Thibeault**, dismissing a purportedly leaked cabinet document – released by the Tories, who claim to have received it from a whistleblower – forecasting electricity prices jumping again in five years.
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“I don’t think today’s sale was a surprise. We’ve been publicly clear about our commitment to

| broaden the ownership.”

- Thibeault, also on the hotseat after the final 120 million shares of Hydro One went on the market. While the sale raised about \$2.8 billion, it also set off a new wave of outrage from the Opposition parties and public sector unions, who are well aware that there is little public support for the sell-off.
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| “Frankly, in Opposition the only way you can be renowned around the province is to do something stupid, is to say something outrageous.”

- PC Leader **Patrick Brown**, brushing off poll numbers that still show, despite his commanding lead in popularity, that many voters don’t know much about him.
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| “My retirement from provincial politics is made knowing some will question or even use my announcement against me, my family, my party and my leader. That would be unfortunate and wrong. Nothing could be further from the truth. Simply put, between my career as an educator and provincial politics, I will be in my 45th year of public service in 2018.”

- Liberal MPP and Legislature Speaker **Dave Levac**, announcing he won’t seek re-election – entirely for personal reasons.
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| “Over the last six years he has proven himself to be one of the most effective Speakers in modern history. And when Dave retires at the end of this legislative session, he will have been the longest serving Speaker in the history of the Ontario Legislature. I know all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will miss Dave’s steady hand, principled approach and calm demeanour.”

- Premier **Kathleen Wynne**, praising Levac.

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