

Queen's Park reno -- see highlighted text

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Premier Spendthrift?; Office renos cost \$300Gs and there's more to come

(Toronto Sun, Lorrie Goldstein)

All things considered, was this really the best time for Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne to approve a \$300,000 renovation of her offices? According to a Toronto Sun Freedom of Information request for information on renovations, office improvements and furniture purchases for the premier's office since June 2016, the \$297,694.25 renovation was completed a year ago on rooms 6340 and 6522 in the Whitney Block, across from the Queen's Park legislative building.

The work included repairing and replacing water-damaged subfloors, new carpeting, "remediation of designated substances in the carpet and flooring," painting, new workstations, replacing window blinds and installing new vinyl flooring in two kitchens. Sure the Whitney Block is old. It was built in 1926 and is the second oldest building at Queen's Park next to the legislative building.

But many Ontarians these days are making do with 15-year-old carpets and blinds (the age of those replaced) and old paint.

This while trying to figure out how to pay their electricity bills, which doubled in 10 years under the Liberals, before coming down 25% this summer under Wynne's "Fair Hydro Plan."

A plan Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says will cost hydro ratepayers (meaning everyone) almost \$40 billion over the next 30 years, including \$4 billion more than necessary so the government can keep it from appearing directly on its books.

Meanwhile, Wynne presides over a government that is the most indebted sub-sovereign borrower on Earth, which just started hitting Ontarians on Jan. 1 for almost \$2 billion a year more, courtesy of Wynne's cap-and-trade plan.

In politics, symbols matter and a \$300,000 renovation in the premier's office at this time isn't a good one.

But it's a drop in the bucket compared to the hundreds of millions of dollars worth of renovations (final cost not yet determined) that the Wynne government has approved for Ontario government buildings.

Called the Queen's Park Reconstruction Project, it's a massive, eight-year renovation of the government's Macdonald Block (built in 1971) and Whitney Block office complexes, which started last year and is scheduled for completion in 2024.

When the Wynne government announced the project last year, it said an "independent, third-party expert panel" had advised it the renovation would save money in the long run and help it meet its greenhouse gas reduction targets to fight climate change.

To wit: "The panel advised that the government's average current expenditure, including operating expenses and capital expenses required to maintain the buildings in their current state, would be reduced from an annual average of \$144 million to \$121 million over 50 years. This results in an estimated return of all costs invested in the renovation and an average annual net savings to the province of more than \$20 million for the next 50 years. Those savings will be achieved through reduced operating costs, lower energy

and capital maintenance expenditures, and the reduction of over 380,000 square feet of third-party leases across the downtown Toronto core. The project will also support the government's efforts to fight climate change."

Many Ontarians will no doubt be skeptical, given this government's record, that we're going to save money in the long run.

And heaven forbid this government, the world's most indebted sub-sovereign borrower, should have to make do with working in unrenovated offices. [@goldstein@postmedia.com](mailto:lgoldstein@postmedia.com)
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