QP Briefing

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1). ABOUT 1,800 COMPLAINTS MADE TO ONTARIO'S PATIENT OMBUDSMAN IN FIRST YEAR

By: Sabrina Nanji

Ontarians apparently had many a bone to pick with their health-care system this past year.

Since opening its doors 12 months ago on July 1, 2016, the province's first-ever patient ombudsman's office has processed approximately 1,800 complaints about hospitals, home and community care, and long-term care homes.

"People were waiting for us to open, so (the number of complaints) didn't come as a shock," said Christine Elliott, Ontario's health-care watchdog and former Tory MPP, in an interview with QP Briefing Thursday.

"While I wasn't surprised at the number of complaints, I think we were not anticipating that the complaints we received would be as complex and multi-faceted," she said.

Among the top-five, far-reaching trends being monitored are inappropriate or poorly planned discharges from hospitals, with many folks, particularly frail seniors, experiencing challenges when transitioning from the hospital to long-term care or their own homes.

About two-thirds of grievances are about a lack of communication.

"We do hear from people that they feel they're not being listened to, that they aren't being treated as a whole person, that they're just a disease or a condition," Elliott said. "They're also concerned that they're not always getting all of the information that they're entitled to receive from the health-care organization.

"They want to be actively involved in planning their own care," she said.

People also griped about access to care, long wait times and overcrowding in hospitals, for which the Liberals have caught much flak from the public and opposition critics.

Data is still being finalized, but the ombudsman's office says approximately 80 per cent of complaints have been resolved, including those sent to be handled by the self-regulating bodies for health-care professionals, like the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario or College of Nurses.

No investigations have been formally announced by Elliott's office yet, but her first annual report is expected to land on the health minister's desk in late September and will be made public.

Some complaints may have been referred from Ontario ombudsman Paul Dubé, who no longer oversees hospitals, long-term care homes and Community Care Access Centres, now under the Local Health Integration Networks, but received more than 600 complaints about them anyway over the past year. Elliott plans to embark on a public awareness campaign so that people know her office is the appropriate venue to vent their woes.

Sixteen grievances were filed about the patient ombudsman's office itself, mostly regarding sluggish response time or disagreements with decisions. Those were informally resolved, according to Dubé's annual report released this week.

"We're still evolving. We're constantly reviewing our processes to make sure we can respond as quickly as possible to patient and caregiver complaints," said Elliott, who has a somewhat scant staff complement of 17, including four early-resolution officers who take in complaints and three investigators for problems requiring more scrutiny.

She has previously pushed the government to make her a totally independent officer of the legislature, like Dubé, to boost the perception of autonomy. Currently, the patient ombudsman operates under Health Quality Ontario.

The Liberals appointed Elliott to a five-year term in an effort to increase accountability in the health-care system back in December 2015. Before that, Elliott was a Progressive Conservative MPP for nine years before she stepped down in August 2015 after losing a leadership bid to current Tory captain Patrick Brown.

Elliott was the PC critic for health and long-term care and advocated for mental-health reform. She's also co-founder and a director at the Abilities Centre, a fully accessible recreational facility in Whitby.

2). *Who's lobbying for whom*

By: Sabrina Nanji

New, renewed and amended registrations

Chris Benedetti of Sussex Strategy Group on behalf of German Solar Corporation
Kenneth Stewart of The Capital Hill Group Inc. on behalf of Adobe
Kenneth Stewart of The Capital Hill Group Inc. on behalf of BMC Software
Robyn Gray of Sussex Strategy Group on behalf of American Carbon Registry
Peter Curtis of Pathway Group Inc. on behalf of Catholic Cemeteries & Funeral Services (formerly Ontario Catholic Cemetery Conference)
John Perenack of StrategyCorp Inc. on behalf of Ontario Convenience Stores Association
Robyn Gray of Sussex Strategy Group on behalf of Association of Major Power Consumers in Ontario
Paul Pellegrini of Sussex Strategy Group on behalf of Concentrix
Paul Brown of Campbell Strategies on behalf of Yellow Pages Digital & Media Solution Ltd. (formerly Yellow Pages Group Corp.)
Natalie Dash of Campbell Strategies on behalf of Yellow Pages Digital & Media Solution Ltd. (formerly Yellow Pages Group Corp.)
Robyn Gray of Sussex Strategy Group on behalf of ENGIE (formerly GDF Suez Canada Inc.)
Yaron Gersh of The CCS Group (formerly Connect Consulting Solutions) on behalf of Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists
Jason Grier of Santis Health Inc. on behalf of Prolacta Bioscience
Charles Bird of Earnscliffe Ontario Inc. on behalf of Association of Canadian Pension Management
Barry Campbell of Campbell Strategies on behalf of Power Workers' Union
Chris Holz of Campbell Strategies on behalf of Yellow Pages Digital & Media Solution Ltd. (formerly Yellow Pages Group Corp.)
Ivy-Lea Lunau of Eventive Consulting & Project Management Inc. on behalf of Canadian Produce Marketing Association
Barry Campbell of Campbell Strategies on behalf of Yellow Pages Digital & Media Solution Ltd. (formerly Yellow Pages Group Corp.)
Elsa Renzella on behalf of Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada
Lucy Becker on behalf of Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada
Andrew J. Kriegler on behalf of Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada
Paul Howard on behalf of Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada
Diana Iannetta on behalf of Investment Industry Regulatory Organization of Canada
Dr. Adrienne Galway on behalf of George Brown College
Anne Sado on behalf of George Brown College
Dan J. Gale on behalf of Canadian Microelectronics Corporation o/a CMC Microsystems
Peter Stokes on behalf of Canadian Microelectronics Corporation o/a CMC Microsystems
Nancy A. Marlow on behalf of Canadian Microelectronics Corporation o/a CMC Microsystems
Ian McWalter on behalf of Canadian Microelectronics Corporation o/a CMC Microsystems
Luc Fournier on behalf of Motorcycle and Moped Industry Council
Robert Ramsay on behalf of Motorcycle and Moped Industry Council
Li Liu on behalf of Motorcycle and Moped Industry Council
Jo-Anne Farquhar on behalf of Motorcycle and Moped Industry Council
Cory Mulvihill on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Duncan Farthing-Nichol on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Jon Dogterom on behalf of MaRS Discovery District

Shahab Shahnazari on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Barry Gekiere on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Kathleen Kauth on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Ron Dizy on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Salim Teja on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Kathleen Gnocato on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Sasha Sud on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Amie Sergas on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Jane Kearns on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Claire Buré on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Lekan Olawoye on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Usha Srinivasan on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Adam Jagelewski on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Alexis Wise on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Dominique Riviere on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
James Larsen on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Jerry Koh on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Karen Greve Young on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Susan McLean on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Ilse Treurnicht on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Joe Greenwood on behalf of MaRS Discovery District
Scott Allinson on behalf of Human Resources Professionals Association
Bill Greenhalgh on behalf of Human Resources Professionals Association
Alaya Boisvert on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Corrigan Hammond on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Dr. Faisal Moola on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Gideon Forman on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Dr. Peter Robinson on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Jode Roberts on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Lisa Gue on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Rachel Plotkin on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation
Ellen Blais on behalf of Association of Ontario Midwives
Allyson Booth on behalf of Association of Ontario Midwives
Kelly Stadelbauer on behalf of Association of Ontario Midwives
Heather Harding on behalf of Association of Ontario Midwives
Juana Berinstein on behalf of Association of Ontario Midwives
Sabina Hikel on behalf of Association of Ontario Midwives
Colette Rivet on behalf of Cannabis Canada Association
Ian Howcroft on behalf of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters
Paul Clipsham on behalf of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters
Nancy Coulas on behalf of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters
Maria Marchese on behalf of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters
Dennis Darby on behalf of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters
Henry Decloe on behalf of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters
Martin Lavoie on behalf of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters
Mathew Wilson on behalf of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters
Brent Bergeron on behalf of Goldcorp Inc
Steven Thomas on behalf of Goldcorp Inc
David Garofalo on behalf of Goldcorp Inc
Chantal Clement on behalf of Goldcorp Inc
John Mullally on behalf of Goldcorp Inc

Wade Bristol on behalf of Goldcorp Inc
Marc Lauzier on behalf of Goldcorp Inc
Roger Souckey on behalf of Goldcorp Inc
Bryan Watts on behalf of Uber Canada, Inc.
Brett Chang on behalf of Uber Canada, Inc.
Adam Blinick on behalf of Uber Canada, Inc.
Susie Heath on behalf of Uber Canada, Inc.
Chris Schafer on behalf of Uber Canada, Inc.
Jeremy Millard on behalf of Uber Canada, Inc.
Arlene T. Kappheim on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Bernard Bélanger on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Frederic Caron on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Mathieu Trudel on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Serge Huppé on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Yvan April on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Yves Goudreau on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Jonathan Marquis on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Manon Sirois on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Régis Michaud on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Patrice G.Duguay on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Chibani Kheir Eddine Khier on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Geneviève Roy on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Philippe Masuy on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Raphaël Perreault on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Roger Lacasse on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Simon-Pierre Dutil on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Ghislain Levesque on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Marc Béland on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Martine Séguin on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Nicolas Robitaille on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Louis Carrier on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Mejia-Arango on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Claude Morasse on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Michel Lemieux on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Marie-Chantal Turcotte on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Martin Pelletier on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Stéphane Bellefleur on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Jean Bélanger on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Rahaëlle on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Marie-Christine Bélanger on behalf of Premier Tech Ltée
Gillian Kennedy on behalf of AbbVie Corporation
David Link on behalf of AbbVie Corporation
Stephane Lassignardie on behalf of AbbVie Corporation
Adam Cook on behalf of AbbVie Corporation
Caroline Jacques on behalf of AbbVie Corporation
Corry McElrea on behalf of AbbVie Corporation
Loretta Del Bosco on behalf of AbbVie Corporation
Paul Sutton on behalf of AbbVie Corporation
Laurie Dotto on behalf of AbbVie Corporation
Karen Heim on behalf of AstraZeneca Canada Inc.
France Dube on behalf of AstraZeneca Canada Inc.

Nadia Yee on behalf of AstraZeneca Canada Inc.
Jon Feairs on behalf of AstraZeneca Canada Inc.

3). Engineers and Tories zap Wynne for $1 billion in 'wasted' watts

By: Christopher Reynolds

The Grits be power trippin'.

That's how the Tories and the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE) might put it, anyway. OSPE and Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown took the Liberals to task Thursday over a reported $1 billion in clean energy wasted in 2016.

That figure — enough juice to power more than 760,000 homes for a year — represents a 58-per-cent spike in lost electricity over 2015, according to OSPE. The data was gleaned by the engineering regulatory body from two Crown energy corporations.

"These numbers show that Ontario's cleanest source of power is literally going down the drain because we're producing too much of it," said Paul Acchione, a former president and chair of OSPE who serves on its energy task force. "Speaking as an engineer, an environmentalist and a ratepayer, it's an unnecessary waste of clean energy and it's driving up the cost of electricity."

Acchione called out curtailment — when excess power is dumped because it isn't needed or couldn't be sold to neighbouring jurisdictions. "It's when we tell our dams to let the water spill over the top, our nuclear generators to release steam to their condensers and our wind turbines not to turn even when it's windy," he said.

Brown, appearing on CP24 Thursday afternoon, said the curtailment figures — as well as provincial deals to sell surplus energy at discount rates to states such as Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio — have "made Ontario a laughing stock."

The province dumped 7.6 terawatt hours of clean electricity in 2016 and siphoned hydro off on the cheap to nearby jurisdictions to the tune of 21.9 terawatt hours, OSPE said.

"This is the direct result of the Liberals handing out expensive green-energy contracts to Liberal donors for power we don't need," added PC energy critic Todd Smith at a press conference alongside OSPE representatives.

Chuck Farmer, a spokesperson for the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) — from which OSPE culled the waste data, along with Ontario Power Generation — said he couldn't verify $1 billion in power had indeed been wasted.

"We have this very reliable clean system and ... there will be times when ... production of electricity is higher than the demand in the province requires," he said.

Farmer highlighted several savings mechanisms it's considering. One could come by way of switching to a "financially binding day-ahead market" that would purchase power 24 hours before it is needed, rather than the current model of buying electricity every five minutes.

"Right now, we're scheduling in real time," when last-minute bursts of hydro demand mean the voltage comes at a premium.

More market renewal savings might come from moving Ontario's electricity market to a "capacity auction" model, where power producers would be trying to outbid each other to the backup source of energy for the grid, Farmer said. Ontario currently adds new electricity capacity by signing long-term contracts with companies, locking the province into deals that could be above the fluctuating market price for power.

"We've invested a lot in the system to restore the reliability, to phase out the coal-fired generation and to increase the amount of renewable energy on the grid, but also to get ready for this significant phase where we're going to take a lot of nuclear generators out and refurbish them," he added.

With those generators knocked out of the mix for upgrades for years at a time, Farmer said he expects "far less" surplus generation.

Jonathan Hack, president and chair of OSPE, highlighted several of its 21 recommendations to the government for the 2017 Long-Term Energy Plan.

He called for a 25-per-cent drop in residential and commercial rates — distinct from the 8-per-cent tax rebate on hydro bills last January and 17-per-cent rate plunge effected in full by the government as of Canada Day. OSPE also said in a statement a "voluntary interruptible retail" market for electricity would allow customers to tap into surplus clean power periodically at whole sale prices.

Hack called on all parties to "depoliticize the technical judgments" around the energy mix, energy generation, distribution, pricing and future investments.

In 2015, auditor general Bonnie Lysyk said ratepayers could spend up to $9.2 billion more than necessary for green energy over 20-year contracts issued under the Green Energy Act, and shelled out $37 billion too much from 2006 to 2014.

Last fall, the Liberals cancelled plans to sign contracts for up to 1,000 megawatts of power from renewable-energy companies. At the time, Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault said the move would save up to $3.8 billion of the costs projected in the 2013 Long-Term Energy Plan.

Fixing the electricity market was included in the Liberal government’s Fair Hydro Plan, which aims to reduce power bills by an average of 25 per cent, including the already-enacted 8-per-cent rebate.

The Grits' hydro plan will also reduce the global adjustment charge paid by electricity customers by an average of about $2.5 billion over 10 years, in addition to taking the cost of social programs off hydro bills and putting it on to tax bills. The 8-per-cent rebate will cost approximately $1 billion annually, the tax-bill upload will run Ontarians about $2.5 billion over the next three years and interest payments by customers on the global adjustment refinancing will total at least $25 billion, the government says.

With files from Geoff Zochodne

4). Heard: Provincial property up for grabs — if you'll rejig it as a community hub

By: Christopher Reynolds

The province launched a program to give local groups a leg-up on securing community space.

Starting July 4, organizations, Indigenous communities and municipalities can apply to convert surplus government space — such as schools, hospitals or provincial buildings no longer in use — into community hubs.

The program, unveiled Thursday by Infrastructure Minister Bob Chiarelli, will have the province hold those properties for up to 18 months to give public groups the opportunity to turn vacant but coveted sites into the next Daniels Spectrum.

"The province's role is to help make it easier for communities to come together and offer services in an integrated and coordinated way, and to make the best use of public space. Our new initiative gives local communities the opportunity they need to use public properties and build their vibrant and successful hubs," Chiarelli said at the St. James Town Community Corner, established in 2011.

A community hub might offer multiple services, from tenant support to help with job hunting.

"Having sufficient time and resources is critical to their success," said Karen Pitre, the provincial special adviser on community hubs.

"The high level of engagement around community hubs is encouraging and I look forward to continuing our work together."

Groups must apply by Oct. 17, the infrastructure ministry said.

5). Heard: Small business optimism 'took a nosedive' post-labour reform announcement

By: Sabrina Nanji

A survey of small business owners suggests growing unease since the Liberal government unveiled an ambitious plan to give Ontario's labour laws a much-needed makeover.

On Thursday, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) released its monthly national Business Barometer survey — a gauge of how small business owners feel about the economic climate in their respective province. CFIB is among the most vocal critics of the provincial government's proposed Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, which among other things enshrines a $15 minimum wage by 2019.

The outlook in Ontario is apparently bleak — since labour reforms were announced about a month ago, the so-called Business Barometer index dropped 10 points, to 58.0, the biggest month-to-month drop in the history of the survey, placing Ontario third-lowest among the provinces, ahead of only Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador. Per CFIB, index levels indicating healthy optimism typically hover between 65 and 70.

"Small business optimism in Ontario took a nosedive in June," the survey said. "(D)owndraft in Ontario appears likely to be policy based — sweeping labour standards legislation announced in late May which appears to be adding considerable uncertainty over future operating conditions there."

The findings are based on 726 online responses from a random sample of CFIB members, and the survey is considered accurate within 3.6 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

When Premier Kathleen Wynne announced the reforms on May 30, she acknowledged there may be blowback from the employer-side. But strengthening worker protections is good for business, she said.

“Higher wages increase retention, they improve productivity and mean that the people of the province can continue to purchase the goods and services that Ontario businesses sell,” Wynne said at the time.

The proposed changes — informed by a two-year review and extensive consultations with business and organized labour — include increased vacation and emergency leave provisions, equal pay for equal work and an easier path to a union. To enforce that, the labour ministry will recruit 175 more employment standards officers and launch an education campaign so employees and businesses know their legal rights and responsibilities.

The changes were cheered by some unions, while others lamented they do not go far enough to meaningfully tackle the growing uncertain and unstable nature of work.

The accompanying legislation, Bill 148, was fast-tracked this spring and the standing committee on finance and economic affairs embarks on a summer-public-hearing tour in July.