

Evening Media Scan: Budget - April 30, 2017

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Media Scan: Budget

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TV Transcripts

Global Mayor Tory Criticizes Ontario Budget For Failing To Address

Source: Global

Apr 30, 2017 6:08 PM (2)

Anchor: Turning now to other news. Mayor John Tory's criticism of the Ontario budget continued today. This time he's taking aim at the lack of help in addressing the backlog of repairs needed at TCHC buildings.

John Tory, Mayor of Toronto: Social housing for some of our most vulnerable residents should not be the sole responsibility of the cities, including Toronto.

Anchor: Speaking outside Toronto Community Housing homes, Tory says he will be strongly urging Liberal MPPs to stand up for the city and TCHC tenants as he fights for more money. He hopes that if enough pressure is put on local MPPs, the government will change their position, similar to that of when the Liberals stopped Toronto from imposing tolls on the DVP and Gardiner.

Mayor Tory: We saw earlier this year that when 905 Members of Provincial Parliament were upset at the prospect of their residents making even the most modest contribution to the cost of maintaining the Gardiner and Don Valley Expressways they drive on, the Government of Ontario completely changed its position and disallowed Toronto from introducing those tolls.

Anchor: Tory did recognize there were a few items in the budget for the city, including a hotel tax and new initiatives for housing for those with mental illnesses. This is the second time he's criticized the budget. On Friday, he was disappointed by the lack of funding for any of the city's transit plans. That has put the future of the Downtown Relief Line and the Eglinton East LRT in jeopardy.

CFTO Toronto Mayor Calls On Province To Provide Funding For

Source: CFTO

Apr 30, 2017 6:10 PM (6)

Anchor: Mayor John Tory is renewing calls for more funding from the province for public housing.

John Tory, Toronto Mayor: Social housing for some of our most vulnerable residents should not be the sole responsibility of cities.

Anchor: The mayor was joined today by other city councillors at a Toronto Community Housing Complex in Etobicoke. He's been vocal about his disappointment with the level of funding for the TCHC in this week's provincial budget. Today he appealed directly to Liberal MPPs and called on residents to lobby their provincial representatives for more support for the city.

Mayor Tory: In my view, part of the problem that led to this complete absence of any response from the Ontario government on community housing repairs might be that the elected Liberal members of provincial parliament may not have been as engaged as federal counterparts in making the case for Toronto and for the tenants that they represent in Toronto community housing.

Anchor: The mayor has been critical of the Liberal government, saying the city was short changed when it came to funding for transit in this provincial budget.

CityTV Mayor Tory Criticizes Ontario Budget For Failing To Address

Source: CityTV

Apr 30, 2017 6:04 PM (2)

Reporter: Mayor John Tory calling a Sunday news conference to once again call out the Wynne Liberals for what he calls a disappointing provincial budget. He is calling on the province to do its fair share to fix crumbling TCH buildings, yet some say the answer actually lies in the city's own hands.

John Tory, Mayor of Toronto: It really just sort of says to people that there are repairs that are not being

done, there are housing units that are at risk, and we need his help.

Reporter: Standing in front of buildings badly in need of repair, Mayor John Tory once again called on the Wynne Liberals to fix their latest provincial budget.

Mayor Tory: I've tried very hard to be honest at all times with the people of Toronto, and I would be less than honest if I said anything other than the fact that I was deeply disappointed at the failure of last week's Ontario budget to indicate any new funding whatsoever for Toronto Community Housing repairs.

Reporter: The issue is this. Toronto Community Housing is facing a \$1.6 billion repair backlog. The situation has grown so dire TCH expects to close 425 units this year because they are uninhabitable; all this when almost 200,000 people are on the wait list for affordable housing in Toronto. Tory says the repair bill should be split equally three ways between the city, the feds, and the province.

Mayor Tory: I am now asking the Toronto Liberal MPPs to stand up for some of the neediest people in Toronto.

Reporter: Yet some suggest the city could help the situation by increasing property taxes above the rate of inflation. Torontonians currently pay the lowest property taxes in the GTA.

Charles Sousa, Ontario Finance Minister [clip]: They have at their disposal the opportunity to also provide for more revenue.

Reporter: It's something finance Minister Charles Sousa hinted at last week when talking with our own Cynthia mulligan.

Nelson Wiseman, University of Toronto: The city might have to increase property taxes, you know. I mean unless – or what's going to happen? Is it not going to rehabilitate these units? Are these people going to be out on the street?

Reporter: This political science professor says the mayor targeting MPPs is a clear last-ditch effort in an increasingly desperate situation.

Wiseman: I don't know if it will make much difference. The budget is already out.

Reporter: The mayor today saying that is not good enough.

Mayor Tory: I am sure they have been trying but I guess what we need is for them to try harder.

Reporter: And it's not just housing that the city says is in dire need of funds. The mayor has already said some key transit projects won't be completed without more provincial funding, like the Eglinton East LRT project, a project that is currently facing a \$1.6 billion shortfall.

GlobalFocus Ontario: Free Prescription Drugs For Young People

Source: Global

Apr 30, 2017 8:03 AM (1)

Alan Carter, Host: Welcome to Focus, the show that believes giving free drugs to young people is always a good idea.

Voiceover: From downtown Toronto, this is Focus Ontario with Alan Carter.

Alan: Welcome to Focus and our special in-depth look at the 2017 Ontario budget. We're gonna dig into the numbers, we're gonna peer through the spin over this next half hour. And coming up a one-on-one conversation with Charles Sousa, the Finance Minister. Then, opposition critics will get their kick at the can but let's get to the big headline which is free prescription drugs for youth and young people in this province. Asthma inhalers, birth control pills, anti-depressants, any of the 44-hundred prescriptions currently on Ontario's drug benefit plan will be free to anyone 24 and under, that's beginning January 1, 2018. The Liberals pumping an extra 7 billion into health care to help reduce wait times and to expand mental health services. Plus, another 9 billion for capital projects, that's new hospitals to be built in Niagara and Windsor, Mississauga and Hamilton hospitals will be improved among others. And the holy grail of Liberal financial planning over the past couple of years, a balanced budget not only this year, but until 2020.

Charles Sousa, Ontario Minister of Finance [clip]: The 2017 Ontario budget is a balanced. It's the result of

the hard work of the people of Ontario; it's the result of the Liberal plan to make strategic investments.

Alan: Now the point about this being balanced is disputed. More on that in a moment, but first let's talk about that new pharmacare program. Cindy Pom has that part of our budget coverage.

Reporter: The spotlight in this budget is on health care. If you're 24 years old or younger, your prescription drugs will be covered for free starting in January. That means you won't be required to pay for asthma puffers, birth control pills, or insulin doses.

Minister Sousa [clip]: Too many workplace institutions don't offer benefits to the extent that we do. Too many young people are starting on contract and don't have these kinds of benefits. Now they will.

Reporter: Ontario has squeezed the health care sector the last few years to try to balance the books, but with an election around the corner, the Liberals are now turning their focus to health care, committing \$9 billion over the next decade to build new hospitals in the Niagara, Windsor, and James Bay Coast regions. But the opposition isn't buying their promises.

Patrick Brown, Ontario PC Leader [clip]: At the end of the day, we have to remember this, that a Liberal is a Liberal, the Liberal government always goes back to their old ways, and that's what they'll do if they win the next election. They're going to raise taxes even higher, cut even more on health care.

Andrea Horwarth, Ontario NDP Leader [clip]: But it smells like me to another back of the napkin plan that they shoved out the door at the last minute. . . It was made clear to us that the best way to get started on a universal pharmacare plan is to provide an array of medications that are the most commonly prescribed for the most common ailments. And that's where you get your biggest bang for the buck.

Reporter: Although the province is giving health care a boost, it's also taking more out of the pockets of smokers. The cost of cigarettes is going up incrementally so that in three years' time, you'll be paying an extra \$10 per carton, that's about \$1 per pack. Cindy Pom, Global News.

GlobalFocus Ontario: Minister Sousa And Premier Wynne Expla

Source: Global

Apr 30, 2017 8:03 AM (2)

Alan Carter, Host: Well for the first time since 2008, Ontario is in the black. But that is the deficit we are talking about, the yearly number of money in and out. Ontario's overall debt level over the same time period tells a different story. In 2008 before the recession, Ontario had a net debt of \$169.6 billion. That has grown significantly to a projected \$301.9 billion.

Alan [clip]: Why not decide to go after the debt? It has almost doubled since the last recession. If times are good, why aren't we paying that down just in case times are bad again and we are going to have to go into further debt?

Charles Sousa, Ontario Finance Minister [clip end]: We made some choices, definitely. We've chosen to support Pharmacare for children. We've chosen to support more supports for hospitals, for our seniors.

Alan: But are Ontario's books really in balance? That of course is the Liberal claim. But according to the Progressive Conservatives, there is actually a \$5 billion hole.

Patrick Brown, Ontario PC Leader [clip]: This is not a balanced budget. They are in fact running an operational deficit worth more than \$5 billion. They are using every trick in the book to achieve this.

Alan: Now here is the political story behind the budget. Yet again the Wynne Liberals are going with their tried and true formula of taking both ideas and support from the NDP. It was just last weekend that Andrea Horwarth announced a Pharmacare program as her central election promise.

Alan [clip]: Is this a case of the Liberals trying to sideline you and your party by taking some of your ideas and taking away your support?

Andrea Horwarth, Ontario NDP Leader [clip end]: No, in fact I think this is a real signal that we have a government that just does not get it. So, quite the opposite.

Alan: Now here is an odd note from the budget this week. The document itself clocks in at a very slim 294

pages. That is hundreds of pages less than normally we see in a budget. Inside there's all these colourful graphics and charts and pictures – you can see not a whole lot of text. And the government left out some key details, like how much things cost, including the central promise of this budget, free prescription drugs for those 24 and under, is not costed here. The explanation?

Minister Sousa [clip]: It's in our budget, and it's in our plan. It may not be in the document pages – listen, that document is, what, 296 pages long? We are trying to cut it down from the previous ones so you guys will have more time to ask questions, but listen, you can't put everything into the document, and in this case it's built into the plan.

Alan: You can put everything into it? By the way, the number is \$465 million a year, is the projected full year budget for that. And the province is not saying what they expect that to grow to. Now will this budget turn around political fortunes for the Liberals? Kathleen Wynne was selling her new plan in the Legislature in the hours after the budget was released.

Alan [clip]: The budget is balanced, but your big surprise here is Pharmacare. You are saying that free prescription drugs 24 and under, why not test that for income? Why should taxpayers pay for rich people's kids to get their drugs?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: You know our health care system is based on a principle of universality, and what we know is that universality has meant that everyone who needs care gets that care. And so we are applying the same principle to medicines for young people. I think that it is not okay that there are kids in this province whose parents can't afford or feel that they can't afford to get the medicines that they need, whether it is a child who's got a chronic condition like asthma, or whether it's a one-off illness.

Alan: Let me ask you about the choices you've made here because say you are in balance, the opposition says well, you're not really because you sold off some things, one-time stuff. But nevertheless, let's assume that you are in balance. But yet you've decided to spend as opposed to attacking the debt. Why?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: Well remember that those decisions to leverage assets, we've had those in the budget for a number of years. Those dollars are targeted for transit, they are targeted for infrastructure, they are targeted for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. You know we have some very clear initiatives that we have had in the budget for some time, and so we are going to deliver on those. The reality is it's taken a number of years, and it's hard work of people across the province to get to a balanced budget. We're here; we are in a time of economic uncertainty and people need support. Even though Ontario is doing better than any other province in the country in terms of economic growth, better than the G7 countries, not everybody is feeling that. And so we know that right now, people in this province need support, whether it is a break on their electricity bills, or whether it is tuition for kids going to post-secondary, or whether it's free medicines for kids from zero to 24, people need support, and we are going to provide that support.

Alan: We're almost out of time. Premier, will this turn around your political fortunes?

Premier Kathleen Wynne: This is about helping people in the province.

Alan: But you have your eye on 2018. You have your eye on that.

Premier Kathleen Wynne [clip end]: But here it is the thing, Alan. We said we were going to balance the budget in 2017-18. We're doing that. The reason to balance the budget is to be able to invest in the people of the province. We said we were going to do that, we're now investing in the people of the province. So this is absolutely consistent with what I said I was going to do.

GlobalFocus Ontario: Interview With Minister Sousa On Budget

Source: Global

Apr 30, 2017 8:12 AM (3)

Alan Carter, Host: Ladies and gentlemen welcome to the 2017 Ontario budget lockup, and the comedy stylings of Ontario's Finance Minister Charles Sousa.

Charles Sousa, Ontario Finance Minister [clip]: Thank you all for suffering in lockup. You all seem pretty cheery. I can tell by the laughter. There you go.

Alan: It is a tough room, to be sure. Let's be thankful that he is counting instead of just telling jokes, and I

am pleased to welcome Finance Minister Charles Sousa. Back to Focus, thank you so much for being here Minister.

Minister Sousa: Thanks Alan.

Alan: Congratulations on this budget. It's balanced, you have something for young something for old people, something for homeowners, is this a sort of 'Forgive us our transgressions and reconsider the Liberals?'

Minister Sousa: This is a dividend in many respects for the people of Ontario who have weathered through the recession, have contributed to growing our economy – over 700,000 net new jobs have come to our economy, primarily in the private sector, high-paying, full-time. And our economy is stronger; we've managed our program spending effectively to come to balance. We said we would, we're balancing this year, next year, and the year after that, enabling us now to afford things that are important to the people.

Alan: Except at the same time, as you well know, our net debt has gone up substantially. So why are you taking the first opportunity that we have more money and we're in the black to start spending on new programs instead of looking at that debt?

Minister Sousa: Well our net debt as a function of our economy is actually improving. It's starting to go down, and it never achieved the peak that we estimated that it would. We're borrowing \$30 billion less than we had anticipated because of our controls to the deficit. But the first measure to address debt is to balance the books. We've balanced the budget and now we're working towards ensuring that we manage it accordingly.

Alan: What are our annual payments for debt maintenance now?

Minister Sousa: So interest on debt is around \$12 billion a year. It's the lowest percentage of interest on debt in decades. In fact, it's around 8.4 per cent of our revenues, where in the past it used to be 15 and 16 per cent. We've locked in those low-cost rates over 30 and 40 years, so every dollar we borrow, 100 per cent of that goes to build new bridges, new schools, new hospitals and those capital programs will last for decades. And that is the payback we are trying to make for the people of Ontario.

Alan: In terms of going forward, if you look at the budget, you had I believe \$2.6 billion from land transfer tax, including an extra 600 – almost \$40 million more than you expected. You are making a lot of money off of the red-hot real estate market, which puts you in a bit of a conflict as you say well we want to cool it, but we are financing – we are running the government on it.

Minister Sousa: So we do want to make housing more affordable for the people of Ontario, and the pricing of housing has spiked dramatically – 33 per cent just in the GTA, and in some cases around the region up to 40 per cent higher. The measures we've taken is intended to cool the market. There is a non-resident speculation tax that's also being imposed. But at the same time, we've built prudence into our budget. We take forecasts by independent economists, we average them out and we tapered down by almost 100 basis points, and then we put forward our revenue numbers including the activity in the housing market. But the prudence we have built into the system enables to address any shocks.

Alan: Well let's just look at apples to apples. Because if we say \$2.6 billion for land transfer, or just \$640 million extra, I mean that goes to pay for one year, a little more, of your new Pharmacare program. So if the housing market suddenly corrects and comes back down, all of a sudden you're not going to have the money there to be able to pay for all these extra goodies.

Minister Sousa: And that's why it's important for us to be prudent, not to assume that degree that was actually being proposed by many others. And same with interest on debt, we've now sourced an additional \$4-4.5 billion in savings because of some of the measures we've taken. The idea of the budget and any plan we put forward is to manage those challenges as we proceed, and we do that all the time. We over-succeed. We actually have beaten our targets year over year for the last four, five years.

Alan: Let's move on to Pharmacare and the program that you have introduced. I've asked you this, I've asked the Premier this, about why not income means test, and earlier in the program the Premier said 'Well we don't means test for health care. We simply don't do that.' And if that is the case, then why are we age testing?

Minister Sousa: So we do want to expand the universality of health care. We've always advocated for Pharmacare to be a part of it, over the last number of years, on a national scope. It is the first of its kind

now in Canada that we are doing this for our young people. We have it already for those 65 and older, but it is a universal program. It treats everybody equally and...

Alan: Except for those between 25 and 64.

Minister Sousa: And those between 25 and 64 are something we are advocating for still on a national program – it's a start right? We want every child to have a good ability, especially for the more complex illnesses, cancer treatment, which is now a part of our program because it's 4,400 new medications that are being provided through this system, enabling every child and young person that opportunity. And you know youth, the young age of 24 and under, is United Nations' definition. It is also the transition into the workplace. We're trying to capture them before they do.

Alan: Charles Sousa, Ontario's Minister of Finance. Always great to talk to you, Charles. Thank you so much for coming on our show.

Minister Sousa: Thanks Alan.

GlobalFocus Ontario: Opposition Finance Critics React To Ont
Source: Global
Apr 30, 2017 8:25 AM (4)

Alan Carter, Host: Is it balanced? Is it fair? Reaction now to the 2017 Ontario budget from across the aisle. Todd Smith, the Progressive Conservative Energy Critic, and John Vanthof, the Finance Critic for the NDP. Thank you so much guys for being here. Todd, let's start with you. The central premise is it's balanced, is it?

Todd Smith, PC MPP: It's not balanced, no. It's an artificial balance. I actually heard yesterday that it was a fudget budget and I hadn't heard that term in awhile. But clearly what they've done is they've taken the one time sale of assets like the very unpopular sale of Hydro One, and use that money. A number of downtown Toronto real estate properties, they've sold those. As a matter of fact, one of them, the OPG headquarters which is just south of Queen's Park, was sold for about \$200 million. Now OPG is actually renting space in that property, which is one of the most expensive pieces of real estate probably in all of Canada. So no, this is masking it with one-time selling of basically anything that wasn't bolted down.

Alan: But one time selling, that still gets them three balanced budgets, which gets them past the next electoral cycle.

MPP Smith: Yeah that's certainly not what the financial accountability officer in Ontario is telling us. They're saying we're gonna plunge back into multi-billion dollar deficits again in a very near future. So, this is not dealing with the structural deficit that exists in Ontario. This is pre-positioning the Liberal party for the budget, or the election I should say which is coming in 2018.

Alan: John I can't wait for you to tell me how much you hate this pharmacare plan that was your party's idea. And now you are going to have to campaign against.

John Vanthof, NDP MPP: Actually I don't hate the pharmacare announcement. We don't hate it. The quicker we can get pharmacare out there, and if we can get it, this is a partial pharmacare problem, pardon, program. The problem with that program is that if you are 35 and you've got two kids, and two part-time jobs and no benefits under that plan, it sucks to be you. And that's the problem. What we are proposing is that universal pharmacare for the most used drugs across the board. Much different.

Alan: And what is the price tag on your plan?

MPP Vanthof: I believe 475 million.

Alan: See now that's odd because they're saying they can only do 24 and under, and their number is 465 a year. So somebody's math is out of whack.

MPP Vanthof: Well, we've relied on experts, but the question I have for the government is where did they get their number from? 'Cause they're the government and they have supposedly been working on this for months, if not years, and yet, there's no numbers in the budget. It's announced in the budget but there's no numbers.

Alan: You know Todd I would ask you about your pharmacare plan, but I guess that's being worked on along with the energy plan that you have?

MPP Smith: Well you know, actually all of our plans are wired away. There's no question it's just gonna happen.

Alan: Sure.

MPP Smith: 'Cause you see what happens if you put a plan out, the Liberals will steal it.

Alan: Well people will criticize it and actually you'll have an idea of what you stand for and you don't want that.

MPP Smith: Listen, this pharmacare plan that the government put out is what? Number seven. It's the seventh drug plan that they got in the province now. So clearly they're just trying to bigfoot the NDP and they have a much bigger spin machine than clearly the NDP or the official opposition have at Queen's Park.

Alan: Well the politics of this is rerun 2014. You're sidelined, you have a populist leader in search of any kind of populist message to get a hold of, these guys have co-opted your sell-off of Hydro One and now the Liberals come in and scoop your pharmacare, what do you got left?

MPP Vanthof: Well no there's quite a bit of difference. We actually want to stop the sale of Hydro One and start buying it back because we truly believe in public Hydro. That's part of our problem in this province, that we've slowly, that our whole hydro system be privatized, we want to stop that. As far as pharmacare, we've already said it. The one thing the people of Ontario, the last election were promised by the current premier, that she was so progressive, and that she was going to do all the things that we've promised, and it turned out she was Tory light. She's selling Hydro One. She's doing all the things. She's selling all the things.

Alan: You must like that. You're Tory light all day long.

MPP Smith: Absolutely not but you know, this is a monopoly, there's only one set of wires that goes across the province. And we want to keep that in public hands. We just want to run it more efficiently.

Alan: Alright, we got one minute. I want to talk about this. Because this is a nightmare scenario for you guys. 2014 runs again, they sidelined the NDP, it's you guys up against Kathleen Wynne, she's already now given free drugs to 24 and under.

MPP Smith: Nothing wrong with that.

Alan: 25 percent cut in your hydro. All of these goodies coming into play, and you got an untried, untested guy. We're going to see a rerun again and Kathleen Wynne can win.

MPP Smith: I think the dye is cast on the current premier and this government and I think people are starting to see through the lies and deception that have been coming from this budget and many other announcements that have been made recently. There really isn't going to be the relief with their Hydro scheme. There's not going to be relief from the housing crisis that we are in in Ontario, and this budget isn't even a balanced budget.

Alan: 15 seconds John for you to make a case for your party to be relevant in 2018.

MPP Vanthof: Well, I think it's time that people realize that we are the real progressive party. We are the ones who actually came up with the hydro plan that wasn't going to cost the taxpayers, that was going to be fair to Ontarians and still be, and we got the pharmacare plan that will be fair to all Ontarians.

Alan: Great to have you guys here. Thank you so much for joining me.

GlobalWest Block: Interview With Ontario PC Leader On Budget

Source: Global

Apr 30, 2017 11:15 AM (3)

Vassy Kapelos, Host: Welcome back. Late last week Ontario tabled its first balanced budget in nearly a decade, with health care scoring the big headline. The government will provide free pharmaceuticals for

everyone under 25, seniors will get a break for public transit, and young parents will get some help for child care. What does the opposition think of this budget? Patrick Brown is the Progressive Conservative Leader of Ontario and joins me now from Toronto. Mr. Brown, nice to see you. Thanks for being with us.

Patrick Brown, Ontario PC Leader: Well thanks for having me on the show. And I have to say this government, the games they're playing, the charades, the sham – we don't call Charles Sousa the Finance Minister anymore, we call him Chef Sousa, because this budget is not a balanced budget. They may say that but the facts speak differently. This is \$5 billion operational deficit, and when comes to – the numbers are not adding up, we've been warned by the auditor general, the financial accountability officer, that the government was playing games with the numbers, and they really, really have. They have hid debt left, right, and centre, and unfortunately we're still in a pretty ugly financial picture in the province of Ontario.

Vassy: So let me ask you then about what they are presenting as a balanced budget. I think maybe a lot of Ontarians are consuming it as that at this point, they're seeing more money for hospitals, free drug prescriptions, more money for seniors using public transit. Is that all really such a bad thing?

Brown: No. Obviously helping more on hospitals and education and drug access is a good thing, but I think the people of Ontario deserve to know the truth. And once you look at the fine details it's something different. So when you look at the financial details, you realize that the debt is still going to skyrocket over the next year. When you look at education, you know, they brag about 94 new schools that are going to be open, you read the fine details, 300 schools are on the chopping block. When you look at health care, there's a pledge for new funding, but it seems to be going into administration. They're going to hire 84 new executive vice-presidents LHINs rather than actually put money into the front lines. They actually fired 1,500 nurses last year. So it's all in the fine print, and unfortunately, this is a government that has wasted and mismanaged the province's finances. And unfortunately, everyone else is paying for it. The headline out of this budget should 'More deficit. More debt. Here in Ontario we owe more than any province or state in the world.'

Vassy: I want to ask you about that debt load because I think you do have a point. The numbers are pretty staggering. So how would you reduce the debt load?

Brown: I want a value-for-money audit of every single ministry. What we look at is the more we look into this government's spending, the more waste we find. And it's not just about the hydro executives making 10 times more in Ontario than they do in Quebec, it's not just about this bloated administration, executive vice-presidents in health care, the reality is I'm not sure we're getting good value even on the contracts we're giving out. You know the auditor general did an assessment of our infrastructure spending. We're going to spend \$190 billion over 13 years – yes, Kathleen Wynne is making promises for 2030. Please help us she's not still in power then. But on that infrastructure promises, on that money that's being spent that was quite a significant amount, the auditor general's report suggested we could see cost overruns in 35 per cent. That's tens of billions. We have roads on the 403 near Toronto that are being repaved every two years instead of every 15 years. We have a bridge near Pickering where the truss was put in upside down. We don't measure performance; we don't measure whether we're actually getting value for the contracts we give out. And because of that, we're seeing huge cost overruns. I want to look at every single ministry, have a value-for-money audit and make sure that we finally start spending taxpayer dollars appropriately in the province of Ontario.

Vassy: Would you cut program spending though? Or would you have to raise taxes?

Brown: Well, I would make sure we get value for money, and one of the challenges we had for the –

Vassy: But with all due respect, sir, with all due respect – I don't want to interrupt you, but I asked you specifically are you prepared to raise taxes if you have to to decrease the debt load or would you cut program spending?

Brown: I'm not looking at raising taxes. I'm going to make sure we stop wasting. I'm going to make sure we stop the wasteful conduct that this government has had. You know I could give you 100 examples of how they're wasting. I'm not looking at taking services out of the front line. What I'm saying is to make sure that government programs are actually spent appropriately. And I would accept all the auditor general's recommendations on infrastructure to make sure we spend money more appropriately. I'd accept the auditor general's recommendations on health care. We spend 39 per cent of our home care budget on administration. So we're not getting good value. I think if we focus on good value for taxpayers, we can definitely run this province in a more competent manner.

Vassy: Before we go, we don't have much time, but do you think the issue of government finances,

government spending, perhaps overspending as you characterize it, or misspending, will be the ballot box issue next year?

Brown: I think the ballot questions is this is a tired government that's been in power for 14 years that frankly has made Ontario more unaffordable; and it's not just on debt and deficits, it's – everything is going up, whether it's hydro or housing. Everything in Ontario is more unaffordable. You pay more, you get less. And I also think ethics is going to be a ballot question in the next provincial election. Don't forget the fact that we have five OPP investigations into this current government, and we have two major criminal cases proceeding this fall.

Vassy: Okay. Thanks very much, sir.

Brown: Thanks for having me on.

Online Coverage

Toronto Star Pharmacare could be boost for family finances in h
coverage

thestar.com

Sun Apr 30 2017

Section: News | Toronto Star

Byline: Rob Ferguson

Ontario's new pharmacare plan for citizens age 24 and under could mean a booster shot for family finances in homes where a parent has private health coverage, experts say.

How much that will be depends on the type of private plan and the way it's funded. Does an employer pay the whole shot, or share the cost with employees?

It's not so much the savings that private plans will enjoy - and hopefully pass along - when OHIP+ starts paying for 4,400 different prescription medicines for 4 million children, teens and young adults Jan. 1.

It's the co-payments that Ontario parents with private coverage will no longer have to fork out.

"That's going to be felt by a lot more people," says Fabricio Naranjo, vice-president and benefits consultant at Collins Barrow in Toronto.

He estimates the savings to plans as a whole will be small because industry data suggest that drug claims from dependants tend to be about 10 per cent of the total cost.

"It's not a huge amount ... logic would dictate a premium reduction, conservatively, of 5 per cent. Insurers will likely keep some of the savings."

And it could take insurers at least a year after the pharmacare kicks in to see what impact it has on overall costs before they decide to offer any savings, Naranjo adds.

But any parents thinking of withdrawing dependant children from their health plans to save on the higher costs of family premiums should think again, says Tom VanAlstine of TRV Employee Benefits Consulting in Ottawa.

Private plans typically pay for drugs that OHIP+ won't cover - often newer and specialty medications - along with dental care, orthodontics, vision care, travel medical insurance and paramedical services like massages, chiropractors and counselling.

"There's more in a health care plan than just drugs," VanAlstine says in a telephone interview.

"Removing dependants from a plan is likely not the way to go."

The pharmacare plan coverage is for medicines on the Ontario Drug Benefit formulary, which is also used as the basis for taxpayer-funded drugs for seniors and people on social assistance and disability benefits.

While it covers a broad range of drugs, it sometimes takes a year or two for newer medicines to be

included, says Naranjo.

"You want that extra protection."

Health Minister Eric Hoskins said Friday he will set up discussions with insurers, employers and employee groups to make sure lower costs are shared as the government becomes what the insurance industry calls the "first payer" for prescriptions.

"In about two-thirds of the benefit plans in this province that employers have now, they pay for their medicines directly and then pay an additional administrative fee," Hoskins told reporters.

"We will be working with all insurers and our employers and employees to ensure that those savings are passed on. And they will benefit both employers and employees."

In the case of plans funded 100 per cent by employers, the companies themselves could pocket the savings or use them to pay for "enhancements" in coverage for employees and their families, says VanAlstine.

In that spirit, the in-vitro fertilization advocacy group Conceivable Dreams is pressing businesses to include IVF fertility drugs in their health plans, given that costs for one cycle of treatment range from \$2,000 to \$5,000.

"Conceivable Dreams ... encourages all progressive employers to re-invest a percentage of the savings they will realize into the coverage of fertility medicines," president Danielle Xavier says, noting it's estimated that one in six couple lives with infertility.

"When employers show employees that they care, the outcome can only positively impact their bottom line."

The government pharmacare plan, however, comes at a time when employers are increasingly looking at ways to trim benefit costs and as fewer companies are offering benefits.

"This will certainly generate conversations," says VanAlstine.

Toronto Star Children's mental health needs increased funding, p. 1

thestar.com

Sun Apr 30 2017

Section: News | Toronto Star

Byline: Kristin Rushowy

Beth Nowosad started feeling anxious and suffering panic attacks in Grade 8. A counsellor at her elementary school was no help. In high school "there were absolutely no resources," and by Grade 10 she was self-harming.

Before her 18th birthday, she tried to kill herself and ended up in hospital.

"Unfortunately, the funding isn't there" to help kids, said Nowosad, now 24, who only started getting proper treatment when she enrolled in a college program to become a child and youth worker and learned about resources in the community.

"There are so many youth that are waiting so long - there are so many - the government needs to fill the gaps."

For children with mental health troubles, wait lists are the norm - when problems arise, they typically can't get help for a year and a half and end up in hospital, only to be discharged to find they have to wait yet again for services in the community.

Advocates had been hoping for additional funds in the Ontario budget, released Thursday, saying \$118 million is needed immediately to expand treatment and make sure it is available early on.

They say the system is in crisis, and new data to be released Monday by the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), obtained by the Star, indicates the growing problem: Between 2006 and 2016,

emergency department visits by children and youth seeking mental health or substance abuse help went up 63 per cent, and hospitalizations 67 per cent, while at the same time, hospital stays for all other health issues fell by almost 20 per cent.

"This data signals that our current mental health system is not working optimally and is not meeting the needs of children, youth and families in Ontario," said Children's Mental Health Ontario, which represents more than 100 treatment and support centres.

CEO Kim Moran said the money is needed to ensure children have access to treatment within 30 days, as well as to open more care centres, improve referral services and add staff.

"There are 12,000 kids waiting for therapy or intensive treatment," Moran said, noting one in five kids is affected.

Moran's own daughter suffered anxiety and suicidal thoughts starting at age 11, and she knows another mother whose 15-year-old committed suicide waiting for treatment.

The costs of not getting therapy means kids clog wait lists in schools and at college and university - when those services are really meant for those with mild issues, she said.

In the past 25 years, children's mental health has only received two boosts in funding at a time when demand has grown, "and when you are getting zero increases, the funding erodes," she added.

Financially, it makes sense, she added, with community treatment costing up to \$800 a day, and hospital stays more than \$2,300. Children who end up in emergency departments are typically re-admitted at least three more times, she added.

"The government is just not making this a priority," she said. "It gets forgotten."

Michael Coteau, minister of children and youth services, said in a statement to the Star that he is "committed to transforming the way we deliver mental health supports to young people in this province. This starts, first and foremost with improving service delivery and simplifying points of access for young people" with care that is close to home.

He said the government has a "Moving on Mental Health" strategy that "will improve the experience for children and youth with mental health challenges and their families so that, regardless of where they live in Ontario, they will know what mental health services are available in their communities and how to access them."

In total, he added "Ontario provides more than \$3.7 billion in ongoing funding for mental health and addiction services. While there is still more work to be done, supporting mental health initiatives for children and youth across Ontario is a major priority of our government."

For Nowosad, the anxiety first surfaced after her parents divorced, and she was hospitalized in York Region years later, when she was 17.

But because she was close to turning 18, staff there would not put her on a wait-list for youth services. But she wasn't old enough for adult resources, so she waited in limbo, seeing a private social worker for \$120 a session for a few months.

Those gaps need to be addressed, she said.

When Nowosad moved to attend college, it was only "through my professional life in Kingston I was able to find really great resources on my own."

While she still suffers, she has become a youth advocate to push for more funding "and less stigma . . . I definitely see the stigma decreasing."

In Canada, an estimated 70 per cent of adults who suffer mental health issues first saw signs of trouble in their childhood. Youth suicide here is the third highest among industrialized nations.

Children's Mental Health Ontario estimates the \$118 million the system needs annually could save \$1 billion in the long run.

Currently, about 120,000 Ontario children and youth are being treated for mental illness.

While pleased the government announced pharmacare up to age 24, "I don't want to take away from the fact that many kids will benefit from medications, but medication alone won't yield the results we need," said Moran.

Marjory Phillips, a director at the Child Development Institute in Toronto, said youth there needing intensive services can't get it for 10 to 12 months. Right now, 37 families are on its wait list.

While the institute used to provide residential care for children under 12 with serious, disruptive behaviours, it abandoned that after seeing studies that show kids do much better if they remain at home. So now child and youth workers are dispatched out to provide service.

"It also keeps kids out of foster care, and prevents them from being pulled out of their home," she added.

Children with less intensive needs can wait up to two years.

"It's tough (on families)," Phillips said. "They are desperate . . . families go to walk-in (mental health) clinics, and it just doesn't cut it. They need someone to really figure out what's going on with their kid."

Toronto Sun Toronto MPPs must do more to solve community housing

By: Kevin Connor, Toronto Sun

Updated: Sunday, April 30, 2017 05:04 PM EDT

<http://www.torontosun.com/2017/04/30/toronto-mpps-must-do-more-to-solve-community-housing-repair-issues-mayor>

Toronto MPPs have an obligation to do more to solve the disrepair at Toronto Community Housing buildings, Toronto Mayor John Tory says.

"I'm sure they have been trying. What we need now is for them to try harder," Tory said Sunday at the Firgrove TCH complex in Rexdale, where more than 100 units are in a state of having to be shuttered.

He said MPPs in the 905 area were successful getting the province to kill plans for road tolls on the Don Valley Parkway, which would have been a source of revenue for cash-strapped Toronto.

Tory says Toronto MPPs represent constituents living in social housing, "so we need them to keep fighting."

He said he was beyond disappointed with last week's provincial budget.

"What we saw, what we got was a big goose egg when it comes to social housing repairs. There is just no new money in this budget for social housing repairs," Tory said, adding there is a backlog of \$2.5 billion in repairs needed in the city.

Foundations, roofs, kitchens and bathrooms repairs have been left for so long they may be beyond repair.

"If we don't repair them they will have to be closed. They are not safe or appropriate for people to live in and the bottom line is that is where we are headed," Tory said.

During Tory's visit to the Rexdale housing complex, pamphlets were handed out stating "The Ontario Government is not helping to get your housing fixed."

"Tell your MPP that Queen's Park needs to help fix your housing now."

Toronto Sun How much will Wynne's next budget cost Ontarians?

By: Lorrie Goldstein, Toronto Sun

Updated: Saturday, April 29, 2017 09:18 PM EDT

<http://www.torontosun.com/2017/04/29/how-much-will-wynnes-next-budget-cost-ontarians>

You have to wonder how much of our money Premier Kathleen Wynne is willing to spend to win re-election next year.

By my calculations, the cost of Wynne's Thursday budget speech to Ontario taxpayers was \$9.3 billion, or \$422.7 million per page of Finance Minister Charles Sousa's 22-page effort.

Given that, who knows how much it will cost taxpayers next April, considering that will be Wynne's "pre-election" budget, shortly before the June, 2018 vote?

Here are my cost calculations and the reasoning behind them, based on announcements in Wynne's 2017-2018 budget speech:

- * \$190 million over three years "to help create 40,000 new work-related learning opportunities."
- * \$1.8 billion, the estimated annual government revenue, paid for by Ontarians in the form of higher retail prices on most goods and services, from Wynne's cap and trade carbon pricing scheme.
- * \$80 million "to create the Autonomous Vehicle Innovation Network."
- * \$19 million "to help our greenhouse farming sector invest in innovative technologies."
- * \$2.5 billion over three years for Wynne's "Fair Hydro Plan", in which she's using taxpayers' money to subsidize the electricity bills of hydro ratepayers, despite the fact taxpayers and ratepayers are the same people.
- * \$20 million for "respite care to people who volunteer to care for a loved one."
- * \$200 million for more daycare.
- * \$1.6 billion this year (based on \$16 billion over 10 years) for new schools.
- * \$200 million over three years for "First Nation, Metis and Inuit ... post secondary education and training."
- * \$465 million annually for a pharmacare program to provide free prescription drugs to all Ontario children from birth to 24 years of age.
- * \$150 million over three years for a minimum income pilot project for 4,000 low-income households in Hamilton, Thunder Bay and Lindsay.
- * \$1.3 billion over three years "to reduce (medical) wait times."
- * \$518 million "booster shot" for hospitals.
- * \$85 million over three years for home care.
- * \$200 million "to improve the energy efficiency of our schools."

No doubt some of this spending is worthwhile and, to be fair, some of it overlaps.

For example, the \$1.8 billion in annual revenue from cap and trade will presumably help pay for the \$200 million spent to improve energy efficiency in schools.

Taxpayers will also receive partial returns from some programs, such as Wynne's "Fair Hydro Plan", which lowers electricity rates.

That said, all this assumes all the money to be spent on these programs will go where the Wynne government says it will go, in the amounts and during the time frames specified.

On that score, remember it was the Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty, in which Wynne was a senior cabinet minister, that told us the cost of cancelling two controversial gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga prior to the 2011 election, which the opposition parties dubbed "the Liberal seat saver program", would be \$230 million over 20 years.

That turned out to be up to \$1.1 billion, according to the auditor general.

That's not to mention all the other Liberal spending scandals — eHealth, Ornge, green energy, smart meters — where costs soared beyond estimates.

So hold on to your wallets.

Toronto ~~SP~~privacy violation at heart of city's potential plan to

By: Antonella Artuso, Toronto Sun

Updated: Sunday, April 30, 2017 04:45 PM EDT

<http://www.torontosun.com/2017/04/30/privacy-violation-at-heart-of-citys-potential-plan-to-mine-smart-meters-expert-2>

The City of Toronto should not turn smart meters into snitch meters, a globally-recognized privacy expert says.

Dr. Ann Cavoukian said Toronto Mayor John Tory's comment that the city would "mine" residents' water and hydro usage data to figure out how many homes are vacant – the first step in his proposal to levy a special property tax on speculators – raises privacy red flags.

"I'm so appalled by this because it's people's private information. That's what private property means. It's private," said Cavoukian, a three-term Ontario privacy commissioner and the executive director of the Privacy and Big Data Institute at Ryerson University. "I just think they haven't a clue what they're doing here in terms of how inappropriate it is – it is completely contrary to the law.

"This is a terrible erosion of what we consider to be the concept of private property," she said.

Tory told reporters that city staff are preparing a report on empty homes to determine if a speculator tax will be effective in slowing down the dizzying rise in Toronto home prices and opening up more properties for purchase or rent.

Premier Kathleen Wynne, in her budget this week, confirmed that her government not only intends to give Toronto the "broad authority to levy an additional property tax on vacant homes," but is open to offering other municipalities the same power.

When asked to explain how the city would use water and hydro data to see if a home is empty, Tory spokesperson Don Peat said the mayor is waiting to receive a report from city staff on a possible vacant homes tax.

"The report - which the mayor requested - is expected to contain details on how the City would determine whether a home is vacant and any arising privacy issues," Peat said in an email. "Until those details are available, it would be premature for the mayor to weigh in."

Cavoukian said the mayor stated that he would "mine" the data, and she can't see how the city can establish vacancy without violating the privacy rights of all property owners in a municipality.

"This is bulk surveillance. They're going to cast a big net and go fishing and see what they catch – all without the knowledge or consent of the individuals involved," she said. "They have no authority to do this."

Information on how much water is used or electricity consumed can only be collected and used for the purpose originally intended – paying bills - and it's unacceptable to use it for a secondary purpose, she said.

Even if the information is just used to determine the overall extent of the vacant unit problem, which she considered unlikely, it would still be an inappropriate use of the data, Cavoukian said.

Governments, in particular, must be very careful about how they use the information they collect, she said.

When former premier Dalton McGuinty brought in legislation mandating a smart meter on every home, Cavoukian said she met with him to raise her concern that people's private information might be wirelessly

transmitted and abused.

McGuinty agreed that it was important to put in strong controls right at the start, and the privacy commissioner went on to produce several papers on the issue and meet with hydro authorities to spell out the rules.

People often don't realize what their electricity use says about them – like when they are in or their midnight TV watching habits, she said.

And what about snowbirds who are away for almost half the year, she asked.

"This is where the slippery slope starts. And that's why I want to put the walls up right now. Don't even contemplate doing this, Mr. Tory," Cavoukian said.

Toronto Liberals bribe us with OUR money

By: Andre Marin

Updated: Saturday, April 29, 2017 08:39 PM EDT

<http://www.torontosun.com/2017/04/29/liberals-bribe-us-with-our-money>

It was a euphoric sight.

Looking at pictures from the Liberal government side of the Legislative Assembly's chamber Premier Kathleen Wynne and her finance minister Charles Sousa were fist-pumping, high-fiving and jumping with joy. Did we defeat ISIS once and for all, or outsmart US President Donald Trump on NAFTA?

No. We balanced a budget – allegedly. And the first time in over a decade. I say allegedly as the Auditor General takes issue with Liberal math. According to the AG, we're still a few billion dollars away from the "big celebration".

Now what do you think most people having a hard time paying off their monthly credit card would do when they finally managed to do so after more than a decade? They'd likely have a little celebration too but would start thinking about the mounting debt and how to start addressing that. They likely wouldn't go on a new spending spree.

But most people are not at 11% approval rating from the rest of the world and having to face an election in a year. So Wynne and her cohort did just the opposite of most people. They went on a bender with your money. It was a crass example of government bribing us with our own money.

The new orgy of spending was on shiny objects, not on long-term sustainable infrastructure. Toronto Mayor John Tory pounced on Wynne turning her back on no new money for social housing or for not matching federal commitments for transit.

"Yes, the government of Ontario has taken steps to cool our housing market and make things more affordable for those who can afford to buy," he said. "But the province also owes something to those who rely on social housing for a roof over their heads — a roof that past provincial governments built, failed to maintain, and then handed off to cities, especially Toronto," Tory pointed out.

Free drugs for people under 25 years old was the highlight of the budget. In making the announcement, the Wynne government tried to outdo NDP Leader Andrea Horwath's announcement a week before that as Premier she would offer universal access to 125 essential medications.

I don't buy either party's negligible costing of either initiative. There are just too many variables, including the costing of medications. A pharmacare program only makes sense if implemented on a national level for all Canadians.

Budgeting under the provincial Liberals has been a hedonic treadmill. Ignoring the reality of a steadily growing \$310 billion debt, they spend and spend in an attempt to socially reengineer us. It doesn't work. So spend more it is.

Wynne's ignoring our debt while selling assets like Hydro One to finance pet projects to frame the issues for the upcoming provincial election. Paying down debt may not appear sexy like offering free drugs, but

we expect leaders to have the courage to do politically tough things – not just play politics with our money.

If we are, as Wynne claims, in the black why not have a plan for reducing our liability? If not now, when?

Andre Marin is the former Ombudsman of Ontario (2005-2015).

Toronto ~~SW~~Weekend, segregation inmates get mattresses on floor

By: Andrew Seymour

Updated: Sunday, April 30, 2017 06:57 PM EDT

<http://www.ottawasun.com/2017/04/30/weekend-segregation-inmates-get-mattresses-on-floor-in-ottawa-jail>

Ottawa's jail has been so full some weekends that inmates have had to sleep on the floor in the day room of a segregation area typically reserved for those with mental illness.

The president of the union representing correctional officers at the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre said as many as 10 inmates serving weekend sentences have regularly been provided mattresses on the floor in the room, in an area of the jail known as one wing, to ease the overflow.

That segregation area currently largely houses inmates with mental health issues.

Correctional officer and OPSEU local president Denis Collin said inmates serving their sentences on weekends have also been held in holding cells in the admitting and discharge area when the jail is too crowded.

Mattresses have also been used on the floor of some segregation cells, allowing the jail to double up inmates who need to be removed from the general population for disciplinary or other reasons, Collin said.

Reports of inmates on the floor comes as Ontario's Corrections Minister Marie-France Lalonde said on Friday that Ottawa's jail could receive a major renovation or reconstruction after the province set aside money in its budget for improvements to Ontario's jails.

Collin said the jail is "at the seams" despite statements by the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services that it is addressing recommendations by a task force appointed to help ease overcrowding at the jail. That task force was appointed after Postmedia reported that inmates were forced to sleep on mattresses on the floor of segregation shower cells because of overcrowding.

"Inmates sleeping on the floor in regards to intermittents on the weekend is really nothing new to OCDC," said Collin. Putting them on the floor is as common as using the shower cells once was, he added.

"Inmates sleeping on the floor is a means to reduce an overflow at the institution."

The ministry confirmed the practice, saying in a statement: "Due to recent capacity pressures created by the renovations, some inmates have been provided a mattress to sleep in common areas. Once the renovations are complete, we expect that the OCDC will return to being consistently below capacity."

The ministry said no inmates were sleeping on the floor on the weekend of April 22 and 23, which was after Postmedia inquired about the practice.

Collin said he was concerned enough about the situation to invite members of the jail's independent community advisory board (CAB) to tour the common areas where inmates were being held.

"I think as a CAB we have concerns with inmates being placed in places that weren't designed for overnight accommodations, or the number of individuals currently being housed in those spaces," said board chair Rebecca Jesseman, who toured during the week when no weekend inmates were being housed in the area.

"We've definitely noted concerns about the conditions of confinement in the institution in our annual reports," she said. "That includes inadequate housing for the number of inmates in the institution."

Jesseman said CAB's annual reports have raised concerns about the cleanliness of the institution, and "if

you have a context where cleanliness is an issue, and then you are having people on the floor, that's certainly a concern."

Collin said the day room where weekend inmates sleep is near the interim "step-down" units that are meant to help inmates with mental health needs or who require higher degrees of supervision transition from segregation back to general living units. But Collin said the step down units the ministry touted in updates on their progress meeting the task force recommendations were actually put in a repurposed hallway.

"Things are being reported as they are being fixed. It's not. They're all Band-Aid solutions up to now," said Collin. "It's what used to be part of hallways that they added doors to and a couple of tables between the doors and chairs, and now they call them a step-down unit."

Jesseman confirmed that the jail's step-down units were in a repurposed space that "could be described as a hallway."

"They repurposed an existing space. It is a narrow space. It's not ideal and we hope that the ministry continues to look for better long term solutions," she said.

Jesseman said there has been progress at the jail, and that the number of inmates regularly housed in the institution has fallen since the task force report.

The ministry provided numbers for the four weeks between March 13 and April 11. The jail never exceeded 100 per cent capacity during that time frame, although on at least five days it was more than 95 per cent of capacity. The ministry acknowledged that anything over about 90 per cent meant the jail was more or less at capacity.

Among the worst days were from Saturday, March 25, to Monday, March 27, when capacity was at 94.1 per cent, 96.5 per cent and 96.1 per cent over the three days. The previous weekend saw capacity at 95.5 per cent on the Saturday, 95.9 per cent on the Sunday and at 96.9 per cent on Monday, when weekend inmates are allowed to leave the jail. The jail's capacity was at its lowest on April 7, when it was at 82.1 per cent.

An entire wing of two dozen cells which would normally hold two inmates each in the maximum security area is not in service while cell doors are being replaced, said Collin. A number of technology updates are being installed, he added.

Collin said inmates from the maximum security wing had been transferred to other institutions. (The ministry's capacity statistics reflected that reduction, the province said.)

There had been times in the past, including last October when reporters toured the detention centre, when the jail's capacity was at 102 per cent. In February and March 2016, it was at 106 per cent capacity. The jail has 560 official beds.

"We've definitely seen a reduction in the numbers at OCDC, and I think it's important to recognize that and they are making improvements in response to long term plans and also in response to the task force report in terms of the infrastructure," said Jesseman. "At the end of the day, you are still dealing with a very aged facility that wasn't built to suit today's needs, especially looking at considerations like intermittent sentencing and meeting the needs of individuals with mental health needs in particular."

Jesseman said the CAB have noted improvements in access to showers, visits and yard with the overall reduction in the numbers of inmates. The ministry has recently hired 29 new staff, including eight recreational officers to help improve access to programming, Collin said.

But Collin, who himself was a member of the task force that made recommendations to fix the jail, said he has been disappointed with the ministry's progress on many of the recommendations. He commended ministry for hiring new staff but complained the institution still isn't big enough to accommodate everyone.

Ontario Attorney General Yasir Naqvi has announced bail reforms he hopes will reduce the number of accused being held in detention centres, but Collin said the jail is still crammed.

"Even though he's been well-intentioned in providing much-needed relief and having less inmates show up at the institution, until recently people were sleeping on the floor," he said. "His heart might be in right place, but reality check: we're still OCDC a year later."

Global News Patrick Brown slams Ontario budget as a 'sham'

By: Monique Scotti , National Online Journalist, Politics Global News

<http://globalnews.ca/news/3412374/patrick-brown-slams-ontario-budget-as-a-sham/>

At first glance, Ontario's newly tabled provincial budget looks pretty good for taxpayers.

It's the first balanced budget tabled in a decade, and everyone from seniors, to parents, to young people taking prescription drugs, will see more money in their pocket.

But for the leader of the Progressive Conservative opposition, what Kathleen Wynne's Liberals have really presented to voters is a "charade" and a "sham."

"This budget is not a balanced budget," Patrick Brown told The West Block's Vassy Kapelos this weekend.

"They have hid debt left, right and centre, and unfortunately, we're still in a pretty ugly financial picture in the province of Ontario."

Ontario's provincial debt is, in fact, projected to grow from \$312 billion this year, or around \$22,000 for every Ontarian, to an estimated \$336 billion in 2019-2020.

Finance Minister Charles Sousa has argued that the net debt in the province is improving, and the Liberals are borrowing \$30 billion less than they had anticipated.

"So every dollar we borrow — 100 per cent of that goes to build new bridges, new schools, new hospitals, and those capital programs will last for decades," Sousa said last week. "And that is a payback that we're trying to make for the people of Ontario."

Brown says that's not good enough, and if his party manages to form government when Ontarians next head to the polls, he'll launch a "value-for-money audit of every single ministry."

Currently, the opposition leader said, there is too much waste and bloated administration in the province. He said he doesn't think he'd need to raise taxes or cut programs to achieve the savings Ontario needs.

"We have a bridge near Pickering where the truss was put in upside down. We don't measure performance," Brown added. "I would make sure we'd get value for money."

CBC News Mayor to call on provincial Liberals to push for community housing funds

Tory says he's 'deeply disappointed' Ontario budget lacks funds for community housing

By: Dexter Brown, CBC News

Last Updated: Apr 30, 2017 2:02 PM ET

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/tory-ontario-budget-tchc-funding-1.4092578>

Mayor John Tory says he plans to call on provincial Liberal MPPs to push for more community housing funding for Toronto after strongly criticizing the Wynne government in recent months for not doing enough to fix the city's community housing crisis.

Speaking at the Thistletown 2 TCH complex, he added that he is "deeply disappointed" that last week's Ontario budget did not include new funding for Toronto Community Housing (TCH) repairs and said he would call on Liberal MPPs to lobby the premier on behalf of TCH tenants.

"In the coming days, I'll be strongly urging provincial Liberal MPPs to help me stand up for Toronto Community Housing tenants and for Toronto to strongly encourage the premier and ministers to act on behalf of these residents," Tory said.

Federal budget a 'breakthrough,' Tory says

The mayor added that cities cannot shoulder the entire burden of community housing because they are "extremely constrained as to they can raise money to pay for things like massive housing repairs."

"Social housing for some of our most vulnerable residents should not be the sole responsibility of cities, including Toronto," he said.

Tory, however, praised March's federal budget calling it a "major breakthrough."

"[It] indicated Prime Minister Trudeau and his members of parliament and ministers were aware of this crisis in Toronto, understood that they had a role to play in order to resolve it and acted accordingly," the mayor said.

So far, the province has committed \$2 billion in three years for affordable housing, social housing and combating homelessness, while the federal government budgeted \$11.2 billion over 11 years for a national housing strategy in their recent budget.

The federal funds have the flexibility to be used for TCHC repairs, Tory said.

Much of TCH repair bill outstanding

It's money the city badly needs, Tory said, and he added that the city has more than done its part in an agreement set by the previous city council where the federal, provincial and local governments would each pay a third of the repair costs.

"Most of the remaining two-thirds of the repair bill remains outstanding all these years later, to the point where the city has exhausted its ability to pay more," Tory said.

The mayor added that a billion dollars of city-derived funds have already been invested but some TCHC units are still in such disrepair that more than 100 will have to be shuttered in the Thistletown area alone.

Tory previously said that the city needs over \$800 million for the community housing repairs, but those funds aren't in the provincial budget.

Instead, Ontario is offering up to \$100 million worth of land to build some 2,000 affordable housing units on. Some money is also available through the Social Infrastructure Fund, of which Toronto gets a cut of the ongoing three-year \$640-million plan.

Ottawa Citizen WEEKEND, SEGREGATION INMATES GET MATTRESSES ON FLOOR IN OTTAWA JAIL
ottawacitizen.com
Sun Apr 30 2017
Section: Local News
Byline: Andrew Seymour, Ottawa Citizen

Ottawa's jail has been so full some weekends that inmates have had to sleep on the floor in the day room of a segregation area typically reserved for those with mental illness.

The president of the union representing correctional officers at the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre said as many as 10 inmates serving weekend sentences have regularly been provided mattresses on the floor in the room, in an area of the jail known as one wing, to ease the

overflow.

That segregation area currently largely houses inmates with mental health issues.

Correctional officer and OPSEU local president Denis Collin said inmates serving their sentences on weekends have also been held in holding cells in the admitting and discharge area when the jail is too crowded.

Mattresses have also been used on the floor of some segregation cells, allowing the jail to double up inmates who need to be removed from the general population for disciplinary or other reasons, Collin said.

Reports of inmates on the floor comes as Ontario's Corrections Minister Marie-France Lalonde said on Friday that Ottawa's jail could receive a major renovation or reconstruction after the province set aside money in its budget for improvements to Ontario's jails.

Collin said the jail is "at the seams" despite statements by the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services that it is addressing recommendations by a task force appointed to help ease overcrowding at the jail. That task force was appointed after the Citizen reported that inmates were forced to sleep on mattresses on the floor of segregation shower cells because of overcrowding.

"Inmates sleeping on the floor in regards to intermittents on the weekend is really nothing new to OCDC," said Collin. Putting them on the floor is as common as using the shower cells once was, he added.

"Inmates sleeping on the floor is a means to reduce an overflow at the institution."

The ministry confirmed the practice, saying in a statement: "Due to recent capacity pressures created by the renovations, some inmates have been provided a mattress to sleep in common areas. Once the renovations are complete, we expect that the OCDC will return to being consistently below capacity."

The ministry said no inmates were sleeping on the floor on the weekend of April 22 and 23, which was after the Citizen inquired about the practice.

Collin said he was concerned enough about the situation to invite members of the jail's independent community advisory board (CAB) to tour the common areas where inmates were being held.

"I think as a CAB we have concerns with inmates being placed in places that weren't designed for overnight accommodations, or the number of individuals currently being housed in those spaces," said board chair Rebecca Jesseman, who toured during the week when no weekend inmates were being housed in the area.

"We've definitely noted concerns about the conditions of confinement in the institution in our annual reports," she said. "That includes inadequate housing for the number of inmates in the institution."

Jesseman said CAB's annual reports have raised concerns about the cleanliness of the institution, and "if you have a context where cleanliness is an issue, and then you are having people on the floor, that's certainly a concern."

Collin said the day room where weekend inmates sleep is near the interim "step-down" units that are meant to help inmates with mental health needs or who require higher degrees of supervision transition from segregation back to general living units. But Collin said the step down units the ministry touted in updates on their progress meeting the task force recommendations were actually put in a repurposed hallway.

"Things are being reported as they are being fixed. It's not. They're all Band-Aid solutions up to now," said Collin. "It's what used to be part of hallways that they added doors to and a couple of tables between the doors and chairs, and now they call them a step-down unit."

Jesseman confirmed that the jail's step-down units were in a repurposed space that "could be described as a hallway."

"They repurposed an existing space. It is a narrow space. It's not ideal and we hope that the ministry continues to look for better long term solutions," she said.

Jesseman said there has been progress at the jail, and that the number of inmates regularly housed in the institution has fallen since the task force report.

The ministry provided numbers for the four weeks between March 13 and April 11. The jail never exceeded 100 per cent capacity during that time frame, although on at least five days it was more than 95 per cent of capacity. The ministry acknowledged that anything over about 90 per cent meant the jail was more or less at capacity.

Among the worst days were from Saturday, March 25, to Monday, March 27, when capacity was at 94.1 per cent, 96.5 per cent and 96.1 per cent over the three days. The previous weekend saw capacity at 95.5 per cent on the Saturday, 95.9 per cent on the Sunday and at 96.9 per cent on Monday, when weekend inmates are allowed to leave the jail. The jail's capacity was at its lowest on April 7, when it was at 82.1 per cent.

An entire wing of two dozen cells which would normally hold two inmates each in the maximum security area is not in service while cell doors are being replaced, said Collin. A number of technology updates are being installed, he added.

Collin said inmates from the maximum security wing had been transferred to other institutions. (The ministry's capacity statistics reflected that reduction, the province said.)

There had been times in the past, including last October when reporters toured the detention centre, when the jail's capacity was at 102 per cent. In February and March 2016, it was at 106 per cent capacity. The jail has 560 official beds.

"We've definitely seen a reduction in the numbers at OCDC, and I think it's important to recognize that and they are making improvements in response to long term plans and also in response to the task force report in terms of the infrastructure," said Jesseman. "At the end of the day, you are still dealing with a very aged facility that wasn't built to suit today's needs, especially looking at considerations like intermittent sentencing and meeting the needs of individuals with mental health needs in particular."

Jesseman said the CAB have noted improvements in access to showers, visits and yard with the overall reduction in the numbers of inmates. The ministry has recently hired 29 new staff, including eight recreational officers to help improve access to programming, Collin said.

But Collin, who himself was a member of the task force that made recommendations to fix the jail, said he has been disappointed with the ministry's progress on many of the recommendations. He commended ministry for hiring new staff but complained the institution still isn't big enough to accommodate everyone.

Ontario Attorney General Yasir Naqvi has announced bail reforms he hopes will reduce the number of accused being held in detention centres, but Collin said the jail is still crammed.

"Even though he's been well-intentioned in providing much-needed relief and having less inmates show up at the institution, until recently people were sleeping on the floor," he said. "His heart might be in right place, but reality check: we're still OCDC a year later."

Timmins Today LOCAL CHAMBER HAS MIXED REACTION TO 2017 PROVINCIAL BUDGET

Positive measures being taken this year include a focus on increasing post-secondary education and training support as a means of addressing workforce shortages

By: TimminsToday Staff

<https://www.timminstoday.com/local-news/local-chamber-has-mixed-reaction-to-2017-provincial-budget-600640>

NEWS RELEASE

TIMMINS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Though some measures in the 2017 provincial budget may benefit Timmins businesses, the lack of long-term solutions for rising costs for electricity, cap and trade, and debt interest payments is a concern for the Timmins Chamber of Commerce.

The Apr. 27 presentation of the 2017 provincial budget by Finance Minister Charles Sousa proposed several items relevant to the Timmins businesses, including:

- A commitment of \$190 billion in infrastructure spending over 13 years, including a continued commitment to increase the Connecting Links Funding program from \$15 million to \$30 million in 2018;
- Establishing the 2017 budget as a balanced budget, the first since 2008-2009, with commitments to set a trend of balanced budgets in coming years;
- Investing \$200 million over three years to support First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners' access to post-secondary education and training, including \$56 million for Aboriginal Institutes;
- Creating a Career Kick-Start Strategy, which invests \$190 million over three years to create opportunities for graduates and to create more internships; and
- The previously announced Fair Hydro Plan, which would allow 25 percent rate reduction for some small businesses.

"There are some elements of the 2017 budget that stand to have some positive impact on Timmins businesses, but what's not included is a much greater issue," said Bender.

"Namely, energy rates continue to be among our members' largest concerns, and while previously announced measures to reduce those rates through the Fair Hydro Plan are certainly appreciated, much more needs to be done. Although some of the announced investments are a step in the right direction, stronger measures must be taken to protect and grow our economy."

Some positive measures being taken this year include a focus on increasing post-secondary education and training support as a means of addressing workforce shortages -- one of the largest obstacles for

Timmins Chamber members, added Bender.

Funding new opportunities for graduates through the Career Kick-Start Strategy will help to tackle this issue, as will the \$200 million for First Nation, Métis and Inuit learners' access to education and training. Similarly, the commitment to increase the Connecting Link funding program to \$30 million is welcome, but remains insufficient for communities' needs, said Bender.

This fund assists the 77 municipalities to which the province has downloaded the responsibility of maintaining 350 kilometres of Connecting Links – portions of provincial highways traveling through municipalities.

The cost to repair Timmins' 21.2 kilometres of Connecting Link is estimated at roughly \$120 million, but the city was recently refused any funding for its planned 2017 work.

"The budget's lack of specific measures to clarify the use of cap and trade revenues is unfortunate, as these costs represent a major challenge to Timmins businesses' competitiveness," said Bender. "Ontario's regulatory burden is already quite significant, and careful reinvestment of cap and trade funds could help businesses to reduce their costs under this system. These issues must be addressed, and we look forward to working with the provincial government to undertake measures that will support our businesses and our economy."

The government's elimination of the deficit in this budget represents a step in the right direction, but there remains no indication of whether Ontario would seek to pay down its debt.

At roughly \$318 billion, the province's debt load means that interest payments will consume ever-greater portions of the budget; currently, interest payments are \$11.6 billion per year, and represent the province's largest expense. This has already led credit rating agencies to downgrade Ontario's outlook from stable to negative in recent years.

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) shared similar concerns about the growing provincial debt load, which contributes to lower business confidence, according to Richard Koroscil, Interim President & CEO, Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

"Budget 2017 demonstrates that much of Ontario's fiscal outlook will depend on the prosperity of our private sector," said Koroscil.

"The government acknowledged that business investment spending slowed in 2016, though expects firms to increase investment by 3.1 percent, annually, to 2020 – an amount that would outpace growth in real GDP growth and household spending. These assumptions depend upon business confidence – which has fallen precipitously in recent years according to the Ontario Economic Report – and U.S. demand, which is subject to considerable risk given recent comments by American President Donald Trump."

Timmins Press BUDGET SHOWS DECLINE IN SUPPORT FOR RING OF FIRE; BISSON

By: Ron Grech, The Daily Press (Timmins)
Sunday, April 30, 2017 12:46:56 EDT PM

TIMMINS - Opposition members from the North are accusing the Ontario Liberals of reneging on a commitment to help pay for infrastructure within the Ring of Fire after last week's provincial budget saw a massive reduction in funding for Northern Development and Mines.

"The government with great fanfare in two or three throne speeches, at least four or five budgets, and two election cycles during their campaign, promised they were going to have a billion dollars for infrastructure and resolve what needs to be resolved to get the Ring of Fire going," MPP Gilles Bisson (NDP – Timmins-James Bay) told The Daily Press.

"This time, there was no mention of it and I think that's kind of significant because it's not even a placeholder anymore. It's like they've given up on that and used the billion dollars that they would have earmarked for the Ring of Fire and put it in other places where they are trying to shore up their political support, mainly in the downtown Toronto area or the GTA."

MPP Vic Fedeli (PC – Nipissing), in a statement, said it was a "serious shock to see that this year's budget removed all mention of the Ring of Fire. After three years of promises, the Wynne government has completely abandoned this critical mining project.

"The budget takes a massive cut of \$70 million out of the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines. The ministry helps to establish mining operations all over Northern Ontario, creating good well-paying jobs that help to grow our Northern economy — obviously not a concern of this government."

This sentiment was denied, however, by one of the Liberal's Northern MPPs, Glenn Thibeault, who is also the Minister of Energy.

Thibeault (Liberal – Sudbury) told The Daily Press the opposition is "poking holes" merely on the fact "we didn't put a line in our budget about our continued, ongoing support for the Ring of Fire."

Thibeault said, "We are fully committed as a government to the Ring of Fire, and our commitment has not changed. It remains the exact same. And even though it is not mentioned in the budget, we are going to continue to work hard to ensure that we get the Ring of Fire operational."

The Timmins Chamber of Commerce's assessment of the budget was mixed.

While praising the government for increasing the Connecting Link funding program to \$30 million, Christine Bender, president of the Timmins Chamber, in a release, stated the amount "remains insufficient" for communities' needs.

"This fund assists the 77 municipalities to which the province has downloaded the responsibility of maintaining 350 kilometres of Connecting Links – portions of provincial highways traveling through municipalities," she wrote. "The cost to repair Timmins' 21.2 kilometres of Connecting Link is estimated at roughly \$120 million" which is four times the total budget allocated by the province.

"There are some elements of the 2017 budget that stand to have some positive impact on Timmins businesses, but what's not included is a much greater issue," Bender added. "Namely, energy rates continue to be among our members' largest concerns, and while previously announced measures to reduce those rates through the Fair Hydro Plan are certainly appreciated, much more needs to be done."

Another omission that concerned Bender was the "budget's lack of specific measures to clarify the use of cap and trade revenues is unfortunate, as these costs represent a major challenge to Timmins businesses' competitiveness."

Overall, Bisson suggested the Liberals' budget on Thursday was an exercise in damage control.

"This is very much an election budget," the MPP said. "The government is very unpopular. A lot of things they've done in health care by flat lining hospital budgets for 10 years have affected places like Timmins and District Hospital or Sensenbrenner here in Kap.

"Hospitals have been trying to manage with a never-increasing budget while faced with an always-increasing demand. It's been hard. There have been people let go, there has been layoffs, it's been more difficult for people to get services.

"The government knows there have been problems. They know there is going to be an election in a year, so they had to announce something. What they announced is not a bad thing a 3% increase to the base budget (for hospitals) but I think people need to realize what this is all about. This is really about the government who for the last 14 years have caused a problem and are now going into an election cycle trying to look like they can fix the problem."

C o u n t r y W e e k l y : ~~News~~ SPENDING BUDGET PERILOUS FOR PROVINCE

By: David Reevely
Sunday, April 30, 2017 5:27:19 EDT PM

<http://www.countyweeklynews.ca/2017/04/30/big-spending-budget-perilous-for-province>

Premier Kathleen Wynne's activist agenda includes public prescription-drug coverage for Ontarians under 25, a Big Shiny Thing over which she'll be happy to fight the 2018 election.

Drugs are a growing part of total health spending. Much of the pressure comes from seniors, who are living longer, with the help of medications that control chronic conditions, but just about every kid needs at least antibiotics at some point, and some are less lucky.

We've relied on workplace benefit plans to cover a lot of those costs, but those are shrinking and more people are doing work that never comes with a steady employer and health insurance. If we like socialized medicine, restricting public drug coverage to seniors and people on social assistance -- who are covered already -- is strange. Filling the gap has both logic and decency behind it.

It's also superb politics.

Targeting pharmacare at children and young adults means peace of mind for parents and help for entry-level workers going gig to gig or contract to contract, who are the least likely to have benefits-included jobs. These are voters the Liberals love and who they hope will love them back.

When the youth pharmacare program kicks in next January, the election will be bearing down and the Liberals will be able to challenge the Progressive Conservatives to either commit to keeping it or justify scrapping it. See what a trap Obamacare has become for Republicans in the United States, who'd gotten as far as convincing most voters that publicly subsidized health care was a bad idea, right up until they tried to take it away.

Finance Minister Charles Sousa says the full-year cost of the program is \$465 million.

The Liberals learned a trick from Paul Martin when he was federal finance minister, which is to under-promise and over-deliver. But if you keep your budget projections conservative, you can boast how you've beaten expectations and found money lying around.

Some of that extra money is in the budget as a "reserve," or contingency fund. In a household

budget, if we didn't need the money, we'd probably leave it in a savings account or use it to pay down a credit card. Liberals spend it. And they had even more to work with as they overshot revenue projections. As they wrap up this fiscal year, they find themselves with \$2.6 billion in unexpected revenue (including \$640 million from its land-transfer tax) but having overspent their plans by only \$900 million.

Add the leftover reserve and there's the pharmacare money for next year, half a billion dollars for hospital budgets right away, money for child care and home health care, money for schools and transit and on the list goes. The \$600-million reserve budgeted for this coming year alone will be enough to create a new program the size of the youth drug program and then some.

It helps them that the Liberals are taking advantage of a surplus in some public-employee pension funds, which Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says is improper but which other experts say is OK. And they've adopted a sort of partial distinction between operating spending and capital spending, which used to be mashed together into each year's budget in a way they no longer are.

But in spite of this, in spite of the fact interest is pushing the province's real-dollars debt up for years to come, Sousa gets to say he's balancing the budget and spending more on things Ontarians want.

All this spending comes with a risk.

Although Ontario's debt burden is levelling off, it's still the highest it's ever been. We borrow, we stop borrowing, we borrow, we stop borrowing, but we never pay off what we've borrowed. We don't use the good times to recover from the bad.

It all might be worth the cost, but none of it's free.

Nugget *THE NORTH'S SKILLS TRADE SHORTAGE A THREAT TO BUSINESS GROWTH*

Sunday, April 30, 2017 11:41:41 EDT AM

<http://www.nugget.ca/2017/04/30/the-norths-skills-trade-shortage-a-threat-to-business-growth>

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce is expressing concern the province has no clear plan to reduce its debt.

The debt is projected to be \$312 billion this year, or roughly \$22,000 for every Ontarian. It is projected to grow to \$336 billion by 2019-2020.

"This will place tremendous fiscal burden on future generations and considerable pressure on future economic planning," the chamber says.

"Budget 2017 demonstrates that much of Ontario's fiscal outlook will depend on the prosperity of our private sector," Richard Koroscil, interim president and CEO of the chamber, said. "The government acknowledged that business investment spending slowed in 2016, though it expects firms to increase investment by 3.1 per cent, annually, to 2020 - an amount that would outpace growth in real GDP and household spending.

"These assumptions depend on business confidence, which has fallen precipitously in recent years according to the Ontario Economic Report, and U.S. demand, which is subject to considerable risk given recent comments by President Donald Trump."

Ontario's revenues rely on the level and pace of economic activity of the province, but the 2017 budget offers limited vision for how to ensure that private-sector economic growth will continue to rise.

Promised corporate income tax rate relief, which the government paused following the economic downturn, was not reinstated.

While it was encouraging to see the budget expand funding for co-op positions and adult education opportunities, for this funding to be effective it will have to target regions most affected by skills shortages, the chamber said.

"Northern Ontario faces a significant skills shortage that limits businesses' ability to grow. Without regionally targeted funding for skills development, businesses may not be able to overcome that shortage," said Tracy Nutt, chair of the board of the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce.

Neither does the budget provide funding to help businesses develop new technologies required to meet Ontario's CO2 emissions targets. Without this funding to develop new technologies, large emitters may not be able to make the necessary transition to a low-carbon economy, Nutt said.

Kenora Daily Miner and News INVESTMENT IN HEALTH CARE FALLS SHORT OF ONTARIO
HOSPITALS' REAL NEEDS: CAMPBELL

By: Sheri Lamb
Sunday, April 30, 2017 5:33:12 EDT PM

<http://www.kenoradailyminerandnews.com/2017/04/30/liberal-investment-in-health-care-falls-short-of-ontario-hospitals-real-needs-campbell>

Ontario's 2017 budget doesn't go far enough to begin to fix problems the Liberals created when they took power 14 years ago, according to Kenora-Rainy River NDP MPP Sarah Campbell.

"It's kind of a theme with this budget, the Liberals haven't done anything to undo the damage they've created over the past 14 years so we're still in a worse situation than we were when the Liberals took over," said Campbell.

The 2017 Ontario budget confirmed the province will invest \$518 million in hospitals in 2017-2018, a three per cent increase in spending, and invest \$9 billion over 10 years in capital grants to support new hospital projects. Campbell said the announced investments fall short of hospitals' real needs.

"The commitment the Liberals have made in this budget is about \$300 million short of what hospitals say that they need and the government has essentially pinned hospital funding down to the annual rate of inflation of two per cent," said Campbell. "This would only help hospitals keep things as they are, but it does nothing to recognize and address the nine years of cuts and the four years of frozen budgets that hospitals have had under the Liberals."

But, it's the Liberals "fix" for high energy costs that is most disappointing to Campbell. The budget proposes Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan to start in the summer, which suggests household electricity costs will be lowered by an average of 25 per cent and rate increases will be capped to inflation for the next four years.

According to Campbell, the energy relief appears to be a dressed up distraction and won't solve the real problem of overwhelming hydro costs.

"People are telling me they don't want something gimmicky, which is kind of actually what the Liberals have offered," she said. "They're looking for real, permanent, meaningful change. What the Liberals have offered is essentially a 30-year hydro mortgage with a four-year fixed rate, that does nothing to address the underlying costs and reasons hydro is as high as it is."

"If the government doesn't take a hard look at what it's doing and how it's contributed to high hydro rates, we're not only not going to get them under control for now, but we're just downloading these costs and amortizing them over many years onto the backs of our kids and the next generation," she added.

Even though there are some positive benefits for northern Ontarians in the budget for travel expenses related to OHIP medical trips and for providing prescription drugs for people under 25 free of charge, Campbell said she was disappointed there was no mention about funding for the long-promised Highway 17 twinning project and the cleanup of the river system in Grassy Narrows.

Kingston Whig-Standard BODES WELL FOR THIRD CROSSING: **M**AYOR

By: Steph Crosier, Kingston Whig-Standard
Sunday, April 30, 2017 6:29:43 EDT PM

<http://www.thewhig.com/2017/04/30/budget-bodes-well-for-third-crossing-mayor>

KINGSTON - When Mayor Bryan Paterson saw the province's 2017 budget, he saw the third crossing on the horizon.

"I was very encouraged to see this dedicated funding towards new bridges," Paterson said on Saturday morning. "That was exactly the sort of thing I was looking for. It seems like it would be a perfect fit for the third crossing in exactly the time frame that we're looking for."

"So it's nice, having had many, many conversations with provincial officials over the past couple of years, to see a development like this is a really, really good sign."

Ontario Minister of Finance Charles Sousa presented the new budget on Thursday in Toronto. In addition to new pharmacare for Ontarians 24 years old and younger, it featured \$190 billion for roads, highways and bridges over the next 13 years.

Kingston and the Islands MPP Sophie Kiwala said at a local news conference on Friday that currently Kingston's third crossing isn't specifically in the budget.

"Although the third crossing was not written in the budget, I am going to continue to advocate for Kingston on that project and I look forward to more news in the future," she said. "Every community wants to have their project listed in the budget, and I understand that, but there's a very significant packet of funding for infrastructure for roads and bridges and I can tell you I'll be making sure that we have some conversation about that in the future."

Paterson isn't concerned.

"It's not uncommon, though. There are lots of infrastructure projects across the province," Paterson said. "It's rare that a particular project would be named within a budget, so to be honest I wasn't really expecting the third crossing to be mentioned by name, but when I saw that particular funding for new bridges, that really caught my eye."

"Over the next few weeks we're going to be following up and continuing to push hard on this. We think there is a real window of opportunity to make this bridge happen."

Last Thursday the city announced the cost of the bridge would be \$180 million rather than the previously projected \$120 million. A number of causes increased the price tag: inflation and a temporary bridge to protect wetlands are the biggest reasons.

The city is asking both the province and the federal government to shell out \$60 million apiece to

make the bridge happen.

"In my view, \$60 million from the province and \$60 million from the federal government is a fair and reasonable ask," Paterson said. "If you look at the billions of dollars that have been allocated towards infrastructure, we are simply asking for our fair share and nothing more than that."

The final \$60 million would come from the city. Paterson said half would come from developers and the rest can be budgeted without a tax increase.

"We spend millions of dollars on all sorts of other infrastructure projects," Paterson said. "To be able to spend \$30 million, have it fit within our capital plan, so no property tax rate increase, it's just going to be a pocket within our overall spending, that would bring another \$150 million to the table, and build a bridge we've been talking about for 50 years, I think that's a pretty exciting opportunity."

The 2017 budget also made amendments to the Municipal Act to give municipalities such as Kingston the authority to introduce a hotel tax. The Financial Post reports that any municipality that already has a destination marketing fee, such as Kingston, would have to share an amount of their hotel tax revenue with a not-for-profit tourism organization that matches the total revenue generated by the existing destination marketing fee program.

Paterson said he's already had discussions with tourism partners to talk about the best way forward in relation to the tax.

"I think there are certainly opportunities and potential changes to come, but that is something I want to be able to have further conversations before we make any firm decisions on it," Paterson said. "I really do see it as an opportunity to only continue to strengthen the tourism industry in Kingston. Last year was the biggest year for tourism that we've ever had, we want this year to be even better and if there's funding models that will help us to take tourism to a whole new level than let's do it."

Blackburn News HEALTHCARE ALLIANCE CEO SAYS BUDGET ENCOURAGING FOR HOSPITAL

By: Bob Montgomery
April 30, 2017 6:51 AM

<http://blackburnnews.com/midwestern-ontario/2017/04/30/healthcare-alliance-ceo-says-budget-encouraging-hospitals/>

The C-E-O for the Huron-Perth Healthcare Alliance says this week's Provincial budget provided some encouraging news for hospitals.

Andrew Williams says details of funding increases for hospitals won't be available until late next week but adds the budget calls for an increase of 514-million dollars which translates into an increase of about 3 per cent.

Williams says they don't know at this time how much is going to each individual hospital but they have been told each hospital will receive a minimum increase of two per cent, and says some funding will be targeted to areas where wait times are longer than others and for the Alliance that could mean hospitals that perform things like hip and knee replacements.

Williams adds he does not expect any new beds for hospitals but he does expect investment that will move patients through the system more quickly, pointing out that one of the challenges facing hospitals is the inability to move them out of the hospital and into the community or a long-term care facility and that eventually leads to back-up in emergency departments.

Williams says back-ups in ER departments are usually an indication of a problem somewhere else in the system and he believes new funding has to be directed at the entire system to be effective. Williams adds overall he's very pleased with the Province's commitment to increasing funding for hospitals and he's optimistic the funding will be directed to the system as a whole rather than specific sectors.

Torontoist HOW THE PROVINCIAL BUDGET DOES AND DOESN'T SCREW TORONTO

Good: youth will have their drugs covered. Very bad: there is little or no new funding for transit or social housing

By: Sean Marshall
April 30, 2017 at 11:43 AM

<http://torontoist.com/2017/04/how-the-provincial-budget-does-and-doesnt-screw-toronto/>

On April 27, the Ontario government tabled its budget for fiscal year 2017/2018, setting the stage for the governing Liberals bid for re-election in June of next year.

The big highlights include a balanced budget for 2017/2018 and a new pharmacare plan, but only for Ontario residents under the age of 25 (called OHIP+). There's also additional funding for health services and new hospitals in Niagara Region and Windsor, hydro bill subsidies, expansion of rent controls and taxes on foreign property buyers, new child care spaces, and a pilot project testing basic income payments in selected communities.

Some of these, such as extending rent control regulations to all rental properties, will have a big impact Torontonians. The province also green-lighted a municipal hotel and AirBnB tax, after rejecting the City's plans for implementing tolls on the Gardiner Expressway and the Don Valley Parkway.

But there is little or no new funding for transit or social housing. This has angered municipal officials including Mayor John Tory, who has recently been pushing for an LRT line in Scarborough, the relief line subway, and funds to repair or replace dilapidated Toronto Community Housing units. The only nod towards Toronto's housing concerns was a pilot that would cede surplus provincial lands for affordable housing projects in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, land worth \$70 to 100 million. This could allow for construction of "up to" 2,000 units, yet no money for their construction has been allocated.

Meanwhile, the TCHC will have to close 1,000 units in 2017 due to building deterioration, so this modest initiative will not be of any help in the short to medium term.

The provincial government likes to claim that it has invested more in public transportation than any other since it took office in 2003; to be fair, this is factually true. GO Transit has expanded; new light rail lines are under construction in Ottawa, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Toronto, for the Eglinton-Crosstown line; more LRT lines are pledged in Peel Region and Hamilton. The Line 1 subway extension to York University and Vaughan will finally open at the end of the year; funds pledged to build the Scarborough LRT line will be used to help fund the \$3.35 billion one-stop Scarborough subway at the City's urging. Construction will start soon on the Finch West LRT. Combined with bus rapid transit in Mississauga and York Region, and GO Transit's regional express rail (RER), there is a lot of new transit coming to the Toronto area.

Notable by its absence and curiously not mentioned in the 2017 budget is the Sheppard East LRT. It was proposed as part of David Miller's Transit City and rejected by Mayor Ford and it has been in limbo ever since. Scarborough politicians at all levels of government have instead pushed for the one-stop subway extension. Some councillors, such as Jim Karygiannis (Ward 39, Scarborough-Agincourt), continue to push for a Sheppard subway extension. Without funding or political support, the Sheppard East LRT is all but dead.

Mayor Tory is upset that there is no funding for other projects prioritized by the City of Toronto, such as the relief line subway, the Eglinton East LRT, or waterfront transit. Construction on that project, the first of what would have been a network of light rail corridors across suburban Toronto, began in 2009. But in the past, the province has bowed to municipal demands, switching its support from the LRT to the subway in Scarborough and accommodating Tory's SmartTrack platform in its GO Transit plans.

Had Tory shown more commitment for repairing TCHC units and building new social housing—by allocating funding, for example—it's quite likely the province would have pitched in. Instead, Tory's priorities have been to build the subway, push for SmartTrack, rebuild rather than remove, the under-used eastern Gardiner Expressway, and keep property taxes low, despite the urging of doctors, housing experts, and the city's frontline staff working with low-income communities, who all say Toronto's property taxes should be increased.

Tory might accuse the provincial Liberals of “turning their backs” on transit and housing, but it's hypocritical of him to complain. Yes, the province is complicit in neglecting Toronto's housing crisis, and the recent measures to protect tenants come very late in the electoral cycle. But on transit, the province has been willing to not only build new rapid transit, but also bend to the wishes of the City of Toronto.

So, it's a bit rich for Tory to be complaining now.