Morning Media Scan: Budget - May 2, 2017

From: Electronic Media <cab.emedia@ontario.ca>
To: "@OPO-Media Relations and Issues Management" <opo-mediarelationsandissuesmgmt@msgov.gov.on.ca>, "Rowe, Mary (OPO)" <mary.rowe@ontario.ca>, "Bevan, Andrew (OPO)" <andrew.bevan@ontario.ca>, "McEachern, Gillian (OPO)" <gillian.mceachern@ontario.ca>, "Killorn, Bill (OPO)" <bill.killorn@ontario.ca>, "Coe, Michael (OPO)" <michael.coe@ontario.ca>, "Foerster, Carly (OPO)" <carly.foerster@ontario.ca>, "Tomney, Genevieve (OPO)" <genevieve.tomney@ontario.ca>
Cc: "@CAB-Trans CO" <cab-transco@msgov.gov.on.ca>
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MEDIA SCAN: PROVINCIAL BUDGET 2017

May 2, 2017

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Welland Tribune: How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; A4; 2017.05.02

PUBLICATION:	Welland Tribune
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BYLINE:	Lorrie Goldstein
SOURCE:	Welland Tribune
KEYWORDS:	wonder,money,premier,kathleen,wynne,willing
WORD COUNT:	514

How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?

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 true "pre-election" budget? 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."
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$19 million "to help our greenhouse farming sector invest in innovative technologies."
$2.5 billion over three years for Wynne's "Fair Hydro Plan" to subsidize the electricity bills of hydro ratepayers, despite the fact taxpayers and ratepayers are the same people.
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No doubt some of this spending is worthwhile and, to be fair, some of it overlaps.
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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.
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Sudbury Star: How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; A8; 2017.05.02

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Stratford Beacon-Herald: How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; A5; 2017.05.02

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Simcoe Reformer: How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; A4; 2017.05.02

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BYLINE: Lorrie Goldstein
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24 Hours Toronto: What Is Re-Election Worth To Premier Wynne?; A9; 2017.05.02

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SECTION: News
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ILLUSTRATION: / (See hardcopy for photo);
WORD COUNT: 523

What Is Re-Election Worth To Premier Wynne?; Let's add it all up, shall we?

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Woodstock Sentinel-Review: How much will wynne's next budget cost us?; A4; 2017.05.02

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BYLINE:	Lorrie Goldstein
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Daily Observer (Pembroke): How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; A5; 2017.05.02

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Sarnia Observer: How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; A4; 2017.05.02

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Owen Sound Sun Times: How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; A4; 2017.05.02

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North Bay Nugget: 'Quick fix'budget leaves North behind; A3; 2017.05.02

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BYLINE: John Vanthof
SOURCE: North Bay Nugget
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'Quick fix'budget leaves North behind; Government 'intent on tearing Ontario apart'

The Kathleen Wynne government released its latest budget last Thursday, and it is disappointing to say the least.

The first thing that struck me was the Liberal government's continued refusal to stop the sale of Hydro One. Their reasoning is disturbingly clear: The Liberals are using the one-time proceeds from the sale of Hydro One to balance the government's books.

Even worse, the government has lost more than $1 billion of revenue; these funds are now going to private investors who have bought 30 per cent of Hydro One shares.

Going forward, this revenue will continue to be lost every year to private interests, instead of funding the programs and services that Ontario taxpayers rely on.

While the government has proposed to lower the hydro rates by decreasing delivery charges, this plan is funded by the taxpayer through government borrowing.

Ultimately, you and I will continue pay the full hydro bill and resulting interest on this government's debts.

Instead of addressing the overwhelming number of administrative policy problems that led to the current energy crisis, the government has implemented a "quick fix" to solve its political problems.

Many families in Ontario are finding it harder to make ends meet, due to chronic underfunding of necessary government services.

Premier Wynne missed her chance to turn things around in this budget. Instead, Ontario's hospitals have been cut to the bone. There have been many nursing jobs cut and surgeries delayed due to diminished health care access and funding shortfalls. Patients are being kept in hallways, as there are not enough actual beds and rooms for them to stay in -nor is there enough health care staff to provide the needed support.

This budget increases the operational funding for Ontario hospitals by three per cent. Due to the effects of a two per cent increase in annual inflation, this results in a minor funding increase of only one per cent to Ontario hospitals.

Taking into account Northern Ontario's aging population, it is impossible to calculate how such a small increase in hospital funding will accommodate the health care needs of the ill and elderly.

The budget announces a pharmacare program for Ontarians ages 24 and younger. There has been some speculation that the Liberal government was forced into hastily rolling out a pharmacare plan in reaction to a recent NDP announcement.

The NDP has promised to implement a universal pharmacare program for everyone under age 65 upon forming government. Despite announcing their new, agelimited pharmacare plan in the budget speech, there was no budget allotment of costs in the government's accompanying financial documents.

As fewer people have health care benefits, and many cannot afford to pay for prescriptions, it is increasingly urgent that people get solid pharmacare coverage.

The problem with the government's plan is that most families will still be left without protection. With many people beginning their families later in life, primary wage earners over the age of 24 will not be covered by the government's new pharmacare strategy. Again, this appears to a frantic political fix, instead of a well-planned program for the benefit of all.

The budget was especially disappointing for Northern and rural Ontario.

The Ministry of Northern Development and Mines is a huge proponent of Northern Ontario economic development, through support for new investors in the mining sector, and handling of critical services for unorganized townships (eg. services boards); it will suffer a cut of $70.3 million.

The $37.4-million cut to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry are particularly disturbing, as the forest industry is under threat from increased American trade tariffs on softwood lumber.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, which already operates with limited resources in Northern Ontario, is being cut by a further $47.1 million.

The Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund has been frozen. As a result, municipalities won't have any increase to the funding they desperately need to keep up with the ever-mounting costs of services previously downloaded by the province, including road maintenance, policing, social services and vital emergency services.

It feels like the North was forgotten when the government wrote this budget. For the first time since I have represented Timiskaming-Cochrane as MPP, the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission was not even mentioned, nor was the Ring of Fire development.

The Ring of Fire has the potential to be a huge economic driver of our region, and the ONTC has been a significant employer of our labour force.

One of the few mentions of the North in the budget referred to an increase in the Northern Ontario Health Travel Grant to cover more overnight stays for people going outside of their communities for medical services. Judging from this budget, the Wynne government completely fails to understand the fundamental importance of the North's valuable, resource-based economy to the success of this province.

Overall, the economy of the province is improving but only the major urban centres are benefitting, and the outlying areas are being left behind. Instead of uniting the Ontario, the Wynne government seems intent on tearing it apart. John Vanthof in the NDP MPP for Timiskaming-Cochrane.

Cornwall Standard Freeholder: How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; A6; 2017.05.02

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Times-Journal (St.Thomas): How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; A7; 2017.05.02

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Times-Journal (St.Thomas): Identifying issues 'early on' called key to success; A4; 2017.05.02

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SOURCE: Times-Journal (St.Thomas)
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ILLUSTRATION: Laura Broadley, Times-Journal / Brandon Redcliffe blows bubbles a the Oxford-Elgin Child & / Youth Centre on Monday afternoon. The barbeque and family fun event was held to kick off Children's Mental Health Week, May 1-7.;
WORD COUNT: 510

Identifying issues 'early on' called key to success

According to the Oxford-Elgin Child & Youth Centre (OECYC), one in five children/youth in Ontario will experience some sort of mental health problem. Five out of six of those children and youth will not receive the treatment they need.
"I think it's really important to ensure that we start early on. What we do know is that 70 per cent of mental health concerns start in children," said Mamta Chail-Teves, executive director of OECYC.
Preventative action as opposed to reactive action is something Chail-Teves said she believes should be the focus of mental health care.
"Often what youth will find is when it becomes a crisis that's when they're receiving support," Chail-Teves said.
If you start treatment early on it can help the trajectory of the mental health of that person going forward, Chail-Teves said.
Children's Mental Health Week, May 1-7, is a chance to spotlight the ongoing issues and challenges that children and youth face when accessing treatment.
"This is a week where we're really able to highlight children's mental health," Chail-Teves said.
Chail-Teves said one of the biggest barriers to accessing treatment is the stigma surrounding mental health care. Part of Children's Mental Health Week is breaking down those barriers.
"If you have a toothache you go to the dentist to try to alleviate that. The same should be for mental health, yet there is this stigma to seek mental health support," Chail-Teves said.
"Awareness is key. Often I think stigma comes from ignorance, lack of knowledge," Chail-Teves added.
That is what the Vanier Children's Services in London is trying to do with its Mental Health Week campaign. It has partnered with CMHA Middlesex to make the City of London go green, the colour of the

campaign. City hall, the London Convention Centre and other buildings will light up green to bring awareness to the issue of mental health.
"The whole notion of lighting up, going green, turning the green light on things is to bring things out of the shadows. Shine a light. Make people aware of the nature of mental health challenges," said Jim Madden, children and youth mental health systems coordinator with Vanier.
Vanier sees 1,500 children, youth and their families each year for mental health support.
"So, when you begin to extrapolate those numbers out across 11 organizations (in London), we see a lot children and families and youth in our community," said Joanne Sherin executive director of Vanier.
Both Chail-Teves and Sherin said they were disappointed in the lack of funding for child and youth mental health care in the recent provincial budget.
"There wasn't a strong focus on increased funding for children and youth mental health. That is a huge barrier. It's a huge barrier at a systems level," Chail-Teves said.
The last time children's mental health got a base increase was in 2006.
"That was 11 years ago and there was nothing in this recent budget, not a penny, for children and youth mental health. And so, you begin to deal with a system itself that's in crisis," Sherin said.

The Sault Star: How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; A6; 2017.05.02

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The Chatham Daily News: How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; A4; 2017.05.02

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The Chatham Daily News: Grits hope for inroads; A1 / Front; 2017.05.02

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Grits hope for inroads; Party starting to gear up for 2018 provincial election

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With an election looming next year, provincial Liberals are hoping to get their message out in the sea of blue that is Southwestern Ontario.
Hydro prices, the Green Energy Act and the perception that the region has been forgotten compared to larger urban centres have played a role in the party's demise in a number of rural ridings over the years.
The departure of longstanding Liberal incumbents before the 2011 election also was a factor.
However, Deputy Premier Deb Matthews, MPP for London North Centre and a co-chair of the 2018 campaign, believes it's possible for the party to resurrect itself in the area.
"You just have to look at a map of Ontario to see that the southwest is a region where we haven't done well," she said. "But it's also a region where we had really strong representation not very long ago.
"I think that the southwest is good territory for us to really get out and make people understand what it is that we're doing."
Liberal MPPs Pat Hoy and Maria Van Bommel represented Chatham-Kent Essex and Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, respectively, until 2011. Hoy didn't run for re-election and Van Bommel was defeated.
"When I see that we've been successful in the past, I know we can be successful in the future," said Matthews, who also holds the Advanced Education and Skills Development and Digital Government portfolios.

"I think people in the southwest expect us to be good managers and fiscally responsible. The fact that we have been able to get back to balance after 10 years of really hard work I think speaks to our credibility."
Progressive Conservative MPPs Rick Nicholls and Monte McNaughton have served Chatham-Kent Essex and Lambton-Kent-Middlesex in the meantime, often voicing concerns that the area feels left out of the decision-making process at Queen's Park.
The two also have said the region can't handle any more losses in the manufacturing or greenhouse sectors due to energy costs.
But Matthews believes the recent provincial budget, including investments in health care and education, will show how it's committed to the people of the southwest, and the rest of Ontario.
"Regions are different across the province, but when we increase spending on health care, that benefits people in the southwest and everywhere else," she said.
"I would say my riding in London really does represent people right across the province."
Mike Radan, president of the provincial Liberal riding association in Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, said they're forming a search committee for potential nominees.
"We don't have a nomination or anything like that scheduled yet," he said.
"In the next three to six months, I guess, would be the time frame. But (there's) nothing set in stone yet."
The Chatham-Kent Essex Liberal association also is seeking a candidate.
Radan said the party needs to ensure its message reaches residents, particularly on social media.
"We just need to get the word out. We've had some positive economic growth," he said.
"It's just about letting people know about the good things that have been happening in the province in the last few years."
He said the demographics in Lambton-Kent-Middlessex skew a bit older than in other areas, but added they're often just as tech-savvy as young people and believes the party should try to capitalize on that.
"Farmers are quite up-todate on new technology," Radan said.
"They have GPS in their tractors and things like that. They're on social media and getting their news from their phone. Even though it is an agricultural community, they are adaptive with technology. I think that's an important key."
But Radan stressed the party wants to make sure it doesn't jump the gun, noting many people aren't thinking of an election at this point.
"The focus on the government is on governing," he said.
"I think people are just going about their lives and doing their jobs, getting their kids to sports and activities.
"There's no need to inundate them with politics. There's plenty of time as it gets closer to the election to get the information out." TTerfloth@postmedia.com Twitter.com/@DailyNewsTT

The Brockville Recorder & Times: How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; A6; 2017.05.02

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Brantford Expositor: How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; A4; 2017.05.02

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The Belleville Intelligencer: How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; B2; 2017.05.02

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The Barrie Examiner: How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; C2; 2017.05.02

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Ottawa Citizen: When is a hole not a hole in the Ontario budget?; A3; 2017.05.02

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When is a hole not a hole in the Ontario budget?

The Progressive Conservatives have decided that their best line of attack on Premier Kathleen Wynne's latest budget is to allege that it's not really balanced. "Mr. Speaker, it (has) a $5-billion operational deficit through cash grabs, pension assets and one-time and unusual revenue," leader Patrick Brown charged in the legislature Monday. "Will the premier come clean and admit ... the budget is not balanced?" Of course she would not.

Because it's a stupid question. Brown elaborated with a list of things he doesn't like in the budget, which are legitimate things to not like, but they're not frauds.

Usually, when we say there's a hole in a government budget, it means there's a spending cut to be made or a revenue source to be found that isn't identified at budget time.

In Ontario, the canonical example is in one of the later PC budgets when Ernie Eves was premier. The 2001 budget booked $2 billion in revenues from selling provincial assets that weren't named at the time. Most of the year went by without anybody's saying - maybe without the Tories'even knowing - what they might be. The government decided selling Hydro One would do it, set out to make the sale, and then choked. So the Tories had said they'd find $2 billion somewhere, they didn't know where, and they ultimately failed to find it. That was a hole.

Before the last election, the Liberals'budget included $300 million in booked-but-unnamed spending cuts. That was a hole. The NDP platform assumed they'd find those, and another $300 million besides - a doublesized hole. The Tories at the time promised to cut 100,000 jobs from the provincial payroll without a clue as to which jobs those might be, which was a hole of a different sort. This latest budget doesn't have a hole like those.

The budget includes $1.8 billion in projected revenues from selling carbon-emissions permits. That's on the optimistic side, but not crazy. Now, the Liberals have claimed their cap-andtrade emissions plan is revenueneutral, which is obviously not true: you make a new tax revenue-neutral by cutting some other tax, not by keeping the money and spending it on things. You cannot like the idea of auctioning carbon permits. But this isn't a hole: It's clear where the $1.8 billion is supposed to come from and where it's going.

The Liberals are expecting $1.5 billion in increased transfers from the federal government, the Tories complain. Trueish: The increase in transfers is actually $1.3 billion in the end, because the feds are sending less in equalization money this year. Also not a hole. The feds send the provinces a predictable amount of money for health care and social programs; federal infrastructure money also typically flows through provincial governments and there's more of that this year than usual. But it's real money.

There's also $500 million booked from surpluses in a couple of pension plans for public employees. These are the subject of an arcane accounting dispute over whether the government, which couldn't grab the money easily, should be able to count them the way it is. The auditor general says no. A panel of external blue-chip accounting types says yes (for a number of reasons, the easiest of which to grasp is that if the pension plans came up short, the gap would be the government's problem). Going with the auditor-general's ruling would be the safer thing, for sure, but what the government's doing is neither a trick nor a one-time manoeuvre.

And there's $1 billion in expected proceeds from selling another chunk of Hydro One - previous sales of shares have met the government's expectations, so that's a reasonable assumption - and $450 million more from the province's landtransfer tax. The opposition calls that tax a cash-grab, which is fair enough, but again, it's real money.

Look, this is a very spendy budget. Under the Liberals, government has grown and grown. Revenues are up more than expected and the Liberal plan is to use the windfall to spend more rather than pay down debt. Their long-term forecasts say we'll creep back to financial health assuming no shocks to the provincial treasury or the Ontario economy more broadly, which has historically been a bad assumption. Things just don't consistently go OK for 15 years straight.

"We aren't ready for the next rainy day" isn't nearly as stinging a criticism as "The Liberals have a $5-billion hole in their budget." It would have the advantage of being true.

Toronto Sun: Lib-speak on TCH changes; A7; 2017.05.02

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SOURCE: Toronto Sun
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ILLUSTRATION: Veronica Henri, Toronto Sun Files / Housing Minister Chris Ballard says it's a priority to ensure victims of domestic violence get to the top of the housing list.;
WORD COUNT: 770

Lib-speak on TCH changes; Simple question asked twice

After a heated question period Monday, I asked housing minister Chris Ballard if he understood what changes the city needs under his own act to ensure gun-toting thugs and drug dealers are kicked out of Toronto Community Housing - and stay out.

"Our priority is to make sure that people who are victims of domestic abuse are put right at the top...any other decisions are made by Toronto housing," he said.

Huh? All I wanted to know was whether the Kathleen Wynne Liberals intend to make modest but necessary amendments to the Housing Services Act that would ensure dangerous criminals did not have the right to jump the queue and be rehoused in TCHC buildings, once evicted.

After all, in case these outof-touch Liberals hadn't noticed, Toronto council voted unanimously last week to ask the province for the amendments that would start the long road towards improving the quality of life for law-abiding tenants who feel terrified and intimidated by the thugs who've taken over their buildings.

Suggesting to Ballard he didn't answer my question (and perhaps doesn't understand his own act), I reiterated what had already been asked (by me as well as in the Legislature by both opposition leaders).

"I'll say again that the Residential Tenancies Act is strong in those areas and our priority is to make sure those people who are victims of domestic violence get to the top of the list," he said.

"If council has an issue, council needs to go and look at its own regulations as to who it puts on the priority list."

I guess that's a "no" in Liberal-speak.

Earlier in the Legislature when questioned on the same issue by PC leader Patrick Brown, Ballard claimed Brown's, Mayor John Tory's and TCHC's contentions are "incorrect" - their assertions being that drug dealers and assorted thugs can jump the queue and be rehoused in TCHC buildings should they apply after being evicted.

I guess the mayor's task force on community housing led by Senator Art Eggleton and Phil Gillies was wrong, too.

"I'm so disappointed that the leader of the opposition didn't check his facts before he stood up and spread that falsehood," said the former Aurora councillor and journalist, who shockingly is also in charge of Wynne's Poverty Reduction strategy.

For heaven's sake. Other than pandering to the tenant advocate/tenant special interest/hug-a-thug vote, I can't for the life of me understand the downside of making a modest amendment to the provincial laws to put evictions for cause on a more solid footing.

Or doesn't Mr. Minister of Poverty Reduction care about those living in poverty and held hostage by the criminal element in far too many TCHC buildings? I asked Ballard when he was last to a TCHC building rampant with drug-dealers and crack whores.

He said he took two tours with the former gentleman "who just left" sometime in the past year. He didn't

name the gentleman (Greg Spearn), where he visited and when.
"I'm well aware of the conditions, ma'am, well aware," he said rather testily.
Brown said Ballard's response suggested that people are "lying" about evictions for cause.
"When Art Eggleton is saying it, when everyone on council is saying it, when John Tory is saying it and he's calling everyone liars ...they're out of touch," he said.
"I think it's another example of the Liberals being out to lunch."
That said, of the many issues I've covered involving those who can't speak for themselves, the buck-passing on this one is worthy of an Academy Award.
After two long years of (intentional) foot-dragging by the leftist city bureaucrats Tory, to his credit, finally steered motions through his executive committee and council last week asking for formal changes to the provincial laws governing evictions for cause.
Even with the mayor's push, we had to endure nearly three hours of hand-wringing by hug-a-thug leftists on council such as Janet Davis, Sarah Doucette and Gord Perks.
Now the province has an issue? Oy vey.
Ballard also claimed they've put $1.4-B into housing in Toronto since 2003. But that includes money for affordable housing, homelessness prevention and social housing.
The real facts (not the fake ones) are that the province has contributed nothing to date towards repairing decrepit units and at last week's TCHC meeting, officials said $356-million is needed in the next year to keep 1,000 units from shutting tight due to disrepair.
The housing minister said Monday this year's budget has allocated $130-million towards social housing repair. But he didn't qualify whether that applies strictly to Toronto or to the entire province.
SLevy@postmedia.com @SueAnnLevy Scooplevy

London Free Press: How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?; A9; 2017.05.02

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How much will Wynne's next budget cost us?

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 true "pre-election" budget? 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" 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 ($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.
lgoldstein@postmedia.calptemquam

Toronto Star: Liberal budget vows more hospital beds; A8; 2017.05.02

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ILLUSTRATION: Premier Kathleen Wynne has announced 650 more beds for the Trillium hospital system.
WORD COUNT: 576

Liberal budget vows more hospital beds; Premier looks to turn corner on party's low popularity with key health-care investments

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The Trillium hospital system will get 650 more beds at its Mississauga and Queensway locations as part of the Ontario government's $9-billion budget for new health-care centres.
Premier Kathleen Wynne said the projects at Trillium are desperately needed to meet demand as more and more people move into the area.
"The growth that is happening in this region is huge," she told reporters after a campaign-style announcement about the redevelopment, which will include a tower for acute-care patients at the Mississauga site along with a new emergency room and more operating rooms.
Wynne, Finance Minister Charles Sousa - who represents a Mississauga riding - and Health Minister Eric Hoskins stood on a stage before more than a dozen hospital workers in a hot and crowded auditorium at the Mississauga site with cheering staff to tout Trillium as one of five new or redeveloped hospitals across the province in last Thursday's budget.
She credited Trillium chief executive Michelle DiEmanuele with setting the positive tone.
"There's a lot of energy in this place," said Wynne, who has been running behind Progressive

Conservative Leader Patrick Brown in public opinion polls with 13 months to go until the June 7, 2018 election.
"Most of the people in that room are not partisan ... we can't predict how they're going to vote," the premier added.
"It's not an election for them. It's about making sure they get the investment that they need."
The Liberals have been hoping to turn the corner on their low popularity, promising to cut skyrocketing hydro rates 25 per cent by summer, bringing in rent controls on all residential buildings and a 15-per-cent foreign buyers tax to cool an overheated housing market.
In addition, last week's budget included a $475-million annual pharmacare plan covering 4,400 medicines for everyone 24 and under starting in January.
DiEmanuele, a former senior civil servant at Queen's Park, said the money for redevelopment at Trillium "really does set us up nicely."
Aside from the 500 new beds at the Mississauga site at Hurontario and the Queensway, 500 existing beds will be replaced.
A new Queensway Health Centre near Sherway Gardens will get a renovated and expanded urgent care centre - to divert patients from emergency rooms for less serious health problems - and new beds for rehabilitation and complex continuing care, freeing up beds at the Credit Valley hospital site also operated by Trillium.
The Trillium system treats 1.6 million patients a year, including 273,000 in the emergency room, making it one of the busiest in Canada.
At Queen's Park, New Democrat MPP John Vanthof complained that "operating funding for hospitals is $300 million short of what the hospitals say they needed."
"That means that our community hospitals will continue to be squeezed, patients will continue to be treated in hallways and northern and rural hospitals will continue to be forced to cut the services that people count on," said Vanthof (Timiskaming-Cochrane).
"Hospital budgets have been frozen for years. A 2-per-cent increase is basically inflation. That's nothing to crow about. Giving inflationary costs to the base budget isn't exactly a huge gift. So the people who are in hallways and the surgeries that are being cancelled are not going to be corrected by simply an inflationary increase."
Hoskins, at the announcement in Mississauga, said some hospitals will get more than the minimum 2 per cent as part of a $500-million boost to funding for hospitals to cover day-to-day operating costs.

Toronto Star: Rich kids deserve free drugs from pharmacare; A8; 2017.05.02

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Rich kids deserve free drugs from pharmacare

Phased pharmacare is finally coming to Ontario.
Now some opponents want to phase it out before it even begins.
A half-century after Canada took the first halting half-step towards truly universal health coverage - medicare without medicines - we need to take the final step toward truly universal coverage. That means providing all effective drugs to all people of all means and all ages.
The first phase announced in last week's Liberal budget would limit access to young people up until age 25. But its key provision is that prescription medicines would be provided to everyone in that age group

regardless of their income - or their parents' income.
The idea has ignited a backlash from critics in the Progressive Conservative opposition who question why rich kids, or the sons and daughters of millionaires, should be entitled to medicine at no cost. It's a fair question about the inherent unfairness of rich folks getting a free ride when they step out of their limousines.
Except that the same question could just as easily be applied to medicare, which provides universal coverage without age restrictions of any kind. Why accept universality for medicare but not pharmacare?
The answer is that the rich don't get a free ride either way. They pay more than their fair share in our (still) progressive tax system, for which they derive the same benefits as everyone else under medicare, just as they would with pharmacare.
Remember, these are primarily health insurance programs, not charitable giveaways to poor or cash-strapped parents. Medicare isn't like the old universal baby bonus (rechristened the child benefit), providing cash with no strings attached - something the rich don't need, and get taxed back on anyway.
If not for medicare, health insurance would otherwise be offered by private sector companies, as it is in the U.S. Private insurers would compete with one another to screen pre-existing conditions, reduce benefits, overrule doctors and constrain coverage.
Medicare and pharmacare are insurance programs that provide coverage people actually need, rich or poor, while sharing the costs along actuarial lines. The political benefit of universality is that you get buy-in from everyone. The economic benefit of universal medicare is that it saves lives - and, yes, money - by helping people who might not otherwise get treatment.
The ideological appeal of universal pharmacare is that it also offers the benefits of bulk buying. By pooling our purchasing power provincially (and ultimately nationally) government drug insurance would save billions of dollars annually.
Pharmacare isn't charity, it's efficiency. In future, as the private sector slowly rolls up drug benefits the way it has phased out pension plans, the pressure will increase on governments to pick up the slack.
To be perfectly clear, the latest Liberal budget plan isn't perfect. It does not yet provide full coverage for all age groups. If you are between 25 and 65 (seniors get virtually free drugs), you will still be left in the lurch - dependent on your employee benefits plan if you are employed, or government drug benefits if you are on welfare, or nothing at all if you are between jobs and fall between the cracks.
The mystery is why it has taken so long for pharmacare to catch up with medicare, leaving Canada as the only major industrialized country to have one without the other.
Years from now, we will wonder why we dragged our feet instead of taking the inevitable next step, allowing our love affair with medicare to blind us to the scandalous and obscene absence of universal pharmacare across Canada.
Ontario's program, covering 4,400 drugs in the provincial formulary, will one day be seen as the first step along the way. Full credit also to the New Democrats for providing details of their own thoughtful proposal three days before the budget.
Both plans have strengths and weaknesses. The NDP design limits coverage to the 125 most common and effective drugs, with modest co-payments for people of all ages. Targeting the top medicines for bulk purchasing has the advantage of getting the "biggest bang for the buck," as NDP Leader Andrea Horwath argues.
But a future NDP government would leave itself exposed to relentless criticism for excluding other life-saving drugs demanded by patients in need. The Liberal plan is simpler to implement because it covers all drugs in the formulary, reducing the risk that patients might improvise by substituting free drugs for their more costly prescribed medications. But it excludes most adults, many of whom will remain vulnerable.
The point isn't to pick apart the rival plans, but to welcome them for taking us partway. The next step requires the federal government to play its part on pharmacare as it did with medicare and public pension plans - by funding the final phase of a national and fully universal pharmaceutical program.