

QP Briefing: November 29, 2017

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Date: Wed, 29 Nov 2017 18:21:34 -0500
Attachments: 20171129 - QP Briefing.doc (166.91 kB)

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1). Tory MPP to Grits: 'We're going to cut ...' you

By: Christopher Reynolds

The Progressive Conservative party may scoff at the idea that it is in any way like Donald Trump, but on Wednesday, MPP Lisa MacLeod revelled in announcing the future firings of Liberal MPPs.

In a house spat Wednesday, the vocal Tory scrolled through which ministers would lose in an election that's only seven months away.

"We're going to cut an economic development minister who lost 330,000 manufacturing jobs," she said of Brad Duguid, who will not run in the next election. "We're going to cut a minister of infrastructure who doesn't know how to roll out infrastructure. We're going to cut a minister of health who lets patients stay in hospital floors!" MacLeod said halfway through question period.

Lisa MacLeod @MacLeodLisa

You wanna ask me about cuts? I'll tell you about cuts. Starting of course with the entire Liberal front bench who are incompetent. You can save \$12 B right there in eliminating their scandals and scandals to be by voting PC. @brownbarrie @avelshi @waliedesq @thompson
<https://twitter.com/jessiecatherine/status/935956490875293698>

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"We're going to cut a deputy premier who allowed the longest college strike in Ontario history!" she said of Deb Matthews, who is not running in the next election. "We're going to cut a finance minister who had to save his own seat by cancelling \$1.2 billion in gas plants!" she continued, in an off-the-cuff syllabus of stings.

It went on like this, naming seven ministers in total.

MacLeod's punchy scroll of presaged victims came in response to remarks from Finance Minister Charles Sousa, who claimed the PCs' new platform included a \$12 billion gap between spending and revenue.

"What are you guys going to cut?" Sousa had asked. He proceeded to lay out what he "suspects" Tories would put on the chopping block: OSAP, free pharmacare for people under

25 and billions of dollars slated for schools, hospitals and roads — based on the fact that "they voted against these very measures in the past."

MacLeod's litany of seat-losers went on long enough that Speaker Dave Levac cut her off before she got a question in. "When I stand, you sit," he scolded the MPPs, hands folded in front of his robe.

Somehow, MacLeod's mini-jeremiad emerged as a follow-up to her initial question on child care support, which the PCs have pledged to bolster by refunding up to 75 per cent of families' daycare costs.

Less than an hour after their repartee, MacLeod and Sousa clasped each other's arms just outside the legislature, flashing wide smiles and trading niceties.

"He still loves me," MacLeod said. "It's a lovers' quarrel."

After Sousa slipped from her grasp, however, she added: "In the lead-up to an election, people are going to look at our platform, they're going to look at their record, and someone's going to get fired. And I suspect it's going to be the current government."

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2). Hydro One unveils new-look bill for customers

By: David Hains

Customers of Ontario's largest energy company will open up a new-look bill in coming months

Hydro One has redesigned the monthly mailing to its customers, with the aim to make it easier to understand. The 12- to 18-month long redesign project, which involved 5,000 customer interviews and additional surveys, will be unveiled to customers beginning with December bills.

"It's probably been one of the largest sources of complaints from our customers," executive vice-president of customer care Ferio Pugliese said of bills that are frustrating to understand.

Pugliese explained that 35 per cent of the company's call-centre volume is related to understanding items on the bill, or billing practices. The redesign isn't just meant to give consumers peace of mind, but also reduce calls so Hydro One can focus on prioritizing other issues.

"This also reduces costs," he told QP Briefing.

The company's research found ratepayers wanted the "basics right up front," including what they owe, how much they used, and a chart to help visualize the context.

"What [customers] found most confusing was a lot of regulatory language," said Pugliese, adding the company reduced this text by condensing it to the important parts.

The new-look bill is also designed to be mobile-friendly for consumers checking their usage and how much they owe.

The redesign is part of a larger Hydro One effort to improve its public image following its 2015 privatization. Another initiative has seen the company voluntarily institute a moratorium on household power shutdowns during winter months for customers who owe money, so no one is left in the cold. The province later made the program mandatory for other companies.

In spite of its efforts, Hydro One has been repeatedly caught in the political crossfire at Queen's Park. The opposition parties frequently criticize the \$4.5-million earnings of CEO Mayo Schmidt and the company's recent Ontario Energy Board application to increase transmission rates. The NDP have for the past week criticized the company's request to implement prepaid hydro meters. Hydro One has also been criticized during Question Period for its proposed purchase of Washington-based energy company Avista, which was announced in July.

A hint at the province's energy politics will remain on hydro bills: the revamped Ontario Hydro bill will include a line item that spells out Fair Hydro Plan savings. Pugliese defends the decision on the grounds that consumers find it helpful. "We surveyed customers and asked if this was something they would like to see on their bill," he said.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath was critical of the move. On the day that she again tabled a bill to make Hydro One wholly public, she claimed the government influences the company when it is convenient, but on other issues it hides behind a lack of control of the publicly-traded corporation.

"If you're wanting to advertise your political scheme on hydro bills, then you can also be telling Hydro One to ban prepaid hydro meters."

The Ontario government owns less than 50 per cent of Hydro One.

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault supported Hydro One's initiative, arguing it was a win for consumers.

"It really helps provide that clarity ratepayers are looking for when it comes to their bills," he said following Question Period.

Thibeault added that Hydro One will also make its re-design and findings available to other Ontario energy companies, which could voluntarily implement the new templates as soon as early 2018.

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3). NDP seek to ban new for-profit clinics with amendment to omnibus health bill

By: Jessica Smith Cross

The NDP is seeking to clamp down on for-profit health care in Ontario with an amendment to the government's omnibus health-care legislation that would ban new for-profit private clinics.

Bill 160, the Strengthening Quality and Accountability for Patients Act, is in the late stage of committee hearings. Schedule nine of the bill would create a new class of regulated health-care facilities, called "community health facilities," which would comprise the province's private hospitals and various kinds of medical clinics, non-profit and for-profit, including clinics that are currently licensed as "independent health facilities" and other out-of-hospital premises that are not, depending on regulations yet to be created.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath challenged the government on the legislation in question period Wednesday, saying it will open the door wider for private health care in Ontario.

"The NDP has an amendment to this omnibus bill that will ensure that any new health care facilities that open as a result of these changes will be not-for-profit," she said, asking if the government will support it.

Health Minister Eric Hoskins later told reporters government MPPs are studying the amendment, but wouldn't say if they'll support it. However, he said the government has not licensed a new for-profit clinic in the last decade, and intends to continue that trend. In recent years, the government has only licensed five new clinics under the current legislation governing independent health facilities, all of them not-for-profit.

The problem, according to NDP MPP France G  linas, is the preference for not-for-profit health care is not spelled out in the bill and the legislation could be used to support a proliferation of for-profit health clinics in the future.

"I read the bill, I don't read his intention. He may have the best of intention, but this is not what

I vote on, this is not what I work on, I work on what's written in the bill and what's written in the bill is we're opening up the door to more for-profit health care," she said. "It's as clear as that."

The legislation will likely outlast the current minister and current government, and it should be written with that in mind, she said.

Gélinas added that when the Minister says the government hasn't been licensing new for-profit clinics recently, that does not count the hundreds of for-profit clinics for out-of-hospital procedures that have popped up in Ontario in recent years, which aren't licensed as independent health facilities — but likely will be licensed as community health facilities under the new regime proposed in the legislation.

She said the government's briefing on the bill shows it expects the number of these private clinics to continue to grow, which is given as context for why the government is creating a regulatory regime to oversee them.

The briefing cites reports of infections transmitted at pain and endoscopy clinics — out-of-hospital premises not licensed as independent health facilities — as evidence for the need for greater oversight.

Ending, or transitioning, all private hospitals

Meanwhile, Hoskins said the bill will spell change for six Ontario private hospitals that have been grandfathered into existing legislation, which this legislation seeks to repeal and replace.

The briefing on the bill MPPs were given said it will "support the revocation of private hospital licences," and Hoskins said his goal is to end the presence of private hospitals in Ontario.

The legislation would bring those private hospitals under the accountability and oversight regime of community health facilities.

"The legislation also speaks to the eventual repeal of the Private Hospitals Act, after we've say found the appropriate destination, I should say, for the six grandfathered hospitals. So, some of them, for example, function a lot like long-term care homes. So it might be they require [licensing] under the long-term care act," he said.

He described the process as two-step, with immediately providing more oversight of the six hospitals, and then working with them to transition to a different regulatory regime.

The six private hospitals in Ontario are:

- Shouldice Hospital, in York region, which exclusively performs hernia surgeries
- Centric Health's Don Mills Surgical Unit, which performs cosmetic and weight-loss surgeries, as well as hernia operations and orthopedic surgery
- Bellwoods Hospital, which has in-patient beds to provide alcohol addiction services in Toronto
- Beechwood Private Hospital, which provides chronic and palliative care in Penetanguishene
- Woodstock Private Hospital, which provides complex and chronic care in Woodstock
- St. Joseph's Infirmity and Private Hospital, Toronto, which provides assisted living and medical care for the Sisters of St. Joseph nuns

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4). In Brief: Eyeball tattoos, mercury treatment and rental housing

By: Christopher Reynolds

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath has expressed her support for a ban on cosmetic eyeball tattooing now embedded in a proposed patient care bill.

The government is amending Bill 160, currently in committee, to prohibit tattoos on eyeballs as well as jewelry under the mucous membrane that lines them, unless done by a regulated health professional.

The new rule in the 200-page omnibus health-care bill arrives after an Ottawa woman lost part of her vision due to complications from having purple ink injected into the white of her eye.

"Eye tattooing is something that is very dangerous and something that's very harmful," Horwath said Wednesday. "It doesn't seem to me that there's much standard or requirement around the skills of folks who might be undertaking that procedure. And that leaves the person that's wanting to get that tattoo quite vulnerable."

Horwath said banning unregulated procedures is "reasonable, considering that it's a person's sight that will be forever gone should a procedure go wrong."

Health Minister Eric Hoskins said many Ontarians saw the horrible images of the Ottawa woman's eye and eye physicians and surgeons of Ontario came to the government with their concerns, requesting that the eye tattoos are prohibited for non-medical purposes, and anyone but regulated health professionals.

Ottawa has committed to fund a treatment centre for Grassy Narrows, a Northern Ontario First Nation plagued for decades with mercury contamination.

Chief Simon Fobister said at a press conference this morning the pledge was a "dream come true." An estimated \$4.5-million specialized medical centre means residents would no longer have to travel to Winnipeg or Kenora, Ont., for care.

Ontario Indigenous Relations Minister David Zimmer spoke in question period Wednesday of the "very productive and effective meeting" that morning between provincial, federal and First Nations officials.

The promise comes half a century after a paper mill in Dryden dumped 9,000 kilograms of mercury into the English-Wabigoon River system, poisoning fish and the people who eat it, a Toronto Star investigation found.

Housing Minister Peter Milczyn has reannounced a plan to coax municipalities with low vacancy rates into building more rental units.

The province said it will rebate up to \$125 million in development charges over five years for rental projects in participating communities. Municipalities that successfully apply for the provincial program could then select which development projects would qualify for the rebate.

"We believe everyone deserves a place they can call home. Building more rental housing not only helps individuals and families find places to live, it creates strong, vibrant communities," Milczyn said in a statement Wednesday.

"It will deliver many new rental homes, it could be thousands," he added after Question Period Wednesday, saying he was "concerned" about rental rates in the GTA in particular, now down to their lowest level in 16 years at 1 per cent.

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