

QP Briefing: October 23, 2017

From: "Law, Sally (CAB)" <sally.law@ontario.ca>
To: "@CAB-QP Briefing" <cab-qpbriefing@msgov.gov.on.ca>
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Q P B R I E F I N G

October 23, 2017

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Articles

1). Jagmeet Singh bids farewell as an MPP, says hello as federal leader

By: David Hains

Federal NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh bade farewell to Queen's Park, the site where he spent six years as an MPP, eventually rising to deputy leader and capturing the federal leadership contest on the first ballot in October.

"This was where my political career began, and I'm really honoured to be back here as the leader of the federal party," Singh said in Horwath's office.

The former MPP for Bramalea-Gore-Malton visited the NDP's Ontario caucus on Monday, and provincial leader Andrea Horwath said that Singh's promise was readily apparent.

"There's no doubt that I saw the qualities in Jagmeet that would lead to this exact outcome. And that's why he became the deputy leader."

While Singh's focus is now national, he said he'd also find plenty of reasons to tour Ontario during the anticipated spring 2018 election campaign, and that he would offer support any way

that he could.

Singh also weighed in on Quebec's controversial Bill 62, which bans face coverings when public services are being used. The federal NDP leader, who faces questions over his ability to make political inroads in Quebec, unequivocally condemned the move.

"With respect to Bill 62, it's something I'm fundamentally opposed to," adding that there are existing laws in Quebec that should protect minority rights.

Following the press conference, a reporter noted one other sign of Singh's rapid ascension: Compared to six years ago, his French had improved dramatically.

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2). Ontario to add 1,200 new hospital beds with \$140M in-year

By: Jessica Smith Cross

Heading into flu season with unusually high hospital occupancy rates, the provincial government announced Monday funding for 1,200 additional hospital beds in Ontario — before the end of 2017, many in the next two to four weeks.

Health Minister Eric Hoskins announced the \$140-million injection of new funds — above and beyond the spending outlined in the spring budget — at a press conference at Mount Sinai Hospital Monday morning.

The funding will open more than 2,000 places for patients — including the 1,200 additional funded beds in Ontario hospitals, 207 affordable housing units for seniors who who need support when they're discharged from hospital and more than 500 "transitional care spaces" outside of hospital.

That includes re-opening two former hospitals for transitional care; 150 beds at Humber River Hospital's former Finch site and 75 beds at University Health Network's former Hillcrest site.

Hoskins said the number of new funded beds is roughly equivalent to six medium-sized hospitals.

The province published a list of which facilities the beds will be located in, but some of them have not yet been allocated to a particular facility.

Of the total funding, \$40 million will go to boosting the province's home-care budget, Hoskins said.

The funds will last until the end of the fiscal year — through the flu season — and Hoskins said his ministry is now working with the finance and treasury departments to determine what will be funded in the next fiscal year, beginning April 1.

The transitional spaces, in particular, are intended to be permanent, he said.

No long-term care beds were part of the funding announcement, and whether the government risks having patients getting stuck in transitional care beds as long-term care waitlists are high, Hoskins said many patients will be well enough to go home, some will find homes in the new supportive seniors' units and others will go into long-term care when spots are available.

Hoskins also noted that Australia's flu season has been the worst on record, which can be a sign of a bad flu season coming to Canada — and he urged everyone to get their flu shots, which are available as of Monday.

"One aspect of this decision, is to ensure that our hospitals do have the capacity, should we face a particularly bad flu season this year," he said.

The funding comes after media reports, which ramped up last flu season, of overcrowded hospitals, where patients have been left waiting days in "unconventional" spaces, such as hallways, when there were no more beds available.

The New Democrats have been obtaining government figures on occupancy, distributing them to media and hammering the government over the issue. In Question Period, NDP MPP Gilles Bisson, who represents Timmins—James Bay, suggested the government made the decision for political reasons.

"Minister, I will tell you what is not good news is when a government refuses to do something and only reacts when there's a crisis — only when our leader lands in this House and asks question after question, members of this caucus, people across Ontario, hospital CEOs and others who have been saying for years, 'You have underfunded the hospital system.' You froze the budget for how many years? So now because there's an election coming this spring, you're finally doing something and announcing beds in Timmins?"

Hoskins told reporters afterwards the government's motivation wasn't political.

"As much as the NDP would like to claim credit for this because of their pointed questions in the legislature, this is work that began many, many, many months ago," he said.

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3). In brief: Estimates of something or other, high-speed rail &

By: Jessica Smith Cross

Treasury Board president Liz Sandals referred to figures in the Financial Accountability Office's report on the Fair Hydro Plan as "estimates of something or other" in Question Period Monday — which, apparently, "gobsmacked" the leader of the third party.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath had asked in Question Period about the cost of consultants the government used in creating its Fair Hydro Plan, and in her question mentioned figures from the FAO report — including the \$4 billion the FAO estimated the government could save by taking on the debt involved directly, rather than through the complex borrowing structure it plans to use.

"First of all, I think it's important to understand that the numbers that the leader of the third party is throwing around were estimates of something or other — projections that came from the FAO," Sandals responded.

And to that, Horwath shot back: "I have not been gobsmacked in this place for a long time, but for a minister to get up and talk about estimations of 'something or other' is pretty worrisome; for a governing party to do that is pretty worrisome."

The NDP leader continued to criticize the government's use of consultants in media scrums, using three synonyms for one part of the human anatomy in accusing the Liberal government officials of "protecting their own fannies," "backsides" and "political rear."

While in Kitchener Monday, Premier Kathleen Wynne announced the latest developments in her government's plan to build a high-speed rail corridor between Toronto and Windsor. The government launched a website with the latest updates on the plan, which it says could cut travel times across the corridor from over four hours to just over two. According to the website, it could be completed as early as 2031, with the formal environmental assessment process beginning next year.

Meanwhile, Children and Youth Minister Michael Coteau announced \$530,000 spending over two years on programs for autistic children and their families provided by the South Asian Autism Awareness Centre (SAAAC).

The Assessment, Development, Empowerment programs offer information to help families navigate autism services and the SAAAC CARES Parental Mental Health Program offers caregivers emotional support and counselling after their child's diagnosis.

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4). Cabinet officer lawyer defends actions in gas plants email

By: David Hains

Cabinet Office general counsel William Bromm continued to testify at the gas plants trial on Monday, where he defended the actions of senior civil servants responding to unprecedented decisions brought on by the lack of gas plants records. The Cabinet Office's lawyer faced sometimes testy cross-examination by the defence counsel, who also sought to undermine his independence by highlighting his working relationship with Cabinet Secretary Peter Wallace.

Bromm and Wallace had independently testified that co-defendant David Livingston, the former chief of staff to Dalton McGuinty, expressed ignorance or contempt of parliament's powers. In his role as general counsel, Bromm helped Wallace prepare for his testimony to the gas plants committee. The defence team noted occurrences where Wallace and Bromm used the same or similar language, seemingly in an effort to undermine their credibility.

Livingston and former McGuinty deputy chief of staff Laura Miller have pleaded not guilty to three charges related to deleting computer records in the aftermath of the gas plants cancellations.

The strategy by the defence follows testimony by both Wallace and Bromm that was critical of Livingston's behaviour and attitudes when it came to a request from parliament to produce gas plants records. Wallace testified last week that Livingston characterized the opposition's request for gas plants documents as "political bullshit," and in Bromm's testimony he said Livingston described the request as "ridiculous."

Bromm also testified to how senior civil servants tried to make the province's records retention policies clear to political staff. "Based on everything that had transpired, there would have been no question... [the rules behind] having records and keeping records was something that no one would need to write down," he testified in response to a follow-up question by the Crown. But Bromm conceded to the defence counsel that in the absence of a "duty to document" law in Ontario, some potential documents may not have existed in the first place.

Like the cross-examination of Wallace, the questioning of Bromm turned hostile at times. At one point, defence counsel Scott Hutchison asked Bromm whether a memo he wrote about records retention specifically said that only IT staff could delete computer records. The cabinet officer lawyer said when he wrote the memo the idea that this would occur would not have entered his mind, but given past events, he would write different instructions today. When Hutchison tried again to get him to admit that the memo did not forbid an outsider wiping computers, Bromm said he was trying to apply the memo to its appropriate context. "You are not giving me the same courtesy," the civil servant said.

Bromm also spoke to an ongoing effect of the gas plants computer records scandal; since it broke in 2013, very few emails are now being deleted by civil servants or political staff, he said.

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5). Brown refuses to back down to Wynne libel notice

By: David Hains

The Progressive Conservatives are continuing their habit of telling the Liberals to bring it on.

After being served with a notice of libel last week, in a statement released Monday, Patrick Brown's lawyer said his client will not apologize. Libel lawsuits typically give defendants a period of time to apologize for and retract their statements. Instead, Brown's lawyer, Jonathan C. Lisus, referred to two defences that could be seen in a court action, including fair comment and parliamentary privilege.

Brown had said that Wynne was "on trial" in Sudbury, although she only took the witness stand in the bribery case, which could wrap up on Tuesday. He has not apologized for this inaccuracy, arguing that a reasonable observer would realize the intended meaning of the premier's ethics being "on trial" metaphorically.

The PC leader welcomed the Liberal's political gambit and went so far as to throw down one of his own by requesting an expedited trial. The statement also revelled in the potential spectacle of another provincial court case. "You need not lecture Mr. Brown about document deletion and spoilation," said the letter, referring to the notice received from Wynne last week. "Such comments are at the height of irony given events currently unfolding before the Ontario Court of Justice at Old City Hall in Toronto," the letter stated, referring to the ongoing gas plants trial which sees two former top Liberal staffers facing three charges each, for which they have pleaded not guilty.

The gas plants trial also contains an email which outlines a strategy to respond to escalating opposition claims and allegations with litigation. The PCs were eager to share the email this morning, citing the tactic as an example of history repeating itself.

The combative strategy from Brown's PCs also echoes their response to the Liberals' proposed abortion protest buffer zones, where they reacted to a perceived Liberal trap by calling their bluff, supporting the legislation and urging that it get expedited. The government initially did not play ball, before fast-tracking the legislation a week later.

It's an attitude perhaps best summed up by Brown's chief of staff in a tweet:

Alykhan Velshi @avelshi

See you in court?

https://www.ontariopc.ca/statement_from_ontario_pc_leader_patrick_brown_on_premier_wynne_s_libel_letter_sent_last_week

2:43 PM - Oct 23, 2017

16 RETWEETS 42 Likes

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6). First Nations communities weren't consulted on riding name.

By: Christopher Reynolds

What's in a name?

A lot, particularly if proper consultations don't precede it.

Chiefs from the Mushkegowuk Council, a regional body representing seven First Nations, say it's "disrespectful" and "alarming" that an arm's-length commission didn't seek their input to use its name for a new riding.

The grievance ties into one of two freshly drawn-up districts for the 2018 election, Mushkegowuk—James Bay, which is part of a new northern electoral map charted to help amplify Indigenous voices at Queen's Park.

"We were not consulted nor asked if that title can be used for this riding," said Mushekgowuk Council Grand Chief Jonathan Solomon, speaking in Cree at a government committee hearing in Moose Factory on Oct. 12.

"Once trust is shattered, it can never be mended. It's like you put a glass together, but you see the cracks," said Solomon, who heads the regional council.

"We also are very flattered that the name Mushkegowuk is being used, but again, that was a surprise," he added.

Moose Cree First Nation Chief Patricia Faries linked the issue to a lack of representation in the new northeast riding. It would have a population of about 30,000 — roughly one-quarter Indigenous and 60 per cent francophone.

"It really is alarming to use our name, Mushkegowuk, and have it become part of Ontario's structure, democracy, and not really mean anything to us. I find that disrespectful," Faries said. "It's a step backwards."

She called for the southern boundary of the riding to be moved north, "so that it's our people

who would be the majority of it."

As the bill to establish the two new northern ridings reached third-reading debate Monday, the Progressive Conservatives accused the Liberal government of "insulting" northern Ontario First Nations.

PC MPP Vic Fedeli, who sat as a substitute on the committee in Moose Factory a week-and-a-half ago, said that an amendment last week to rename the riding Mushkegowuk—James Bay — instead of simply Mushkegowuk — "boggles my mind."

"They're insulting the insult now. They've doubled down on the insult," he said in the house Monday.

Liberal MPP Sophie Kiwala told QP Briefing the government is open to a riding name change, but that it won't happen this year.

"My understanding from the attorney general is that we will certainly have another look at it and do some more consultations, and following that process, the name can be changed by way of legislative amendment," she said, echoing remarks in the house earlier in the afternoon.

The riding name is set out in a statute. A new name would require an amendment to Bill 152, which is expected to pass third reading Tuesday afternoon.

Kiwala added that the commissioners, three of five of whom were Indigenous, consulted nine First Nations communities and attended assemblies in northern Ontario over the spring and summer.

"We're more than happy to hear what they would like to bring forward," she said.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler said the three-month timeline of the independent Far North Electoral Boundaries Commission "felt really rushed, and I think as a result of that our communities, including the leadership, were not engaged in a meaningful way." He noted the commission met only once with Mushkegowuk Council members, in early May in Timmins, shortly after the commission launched.

Mushkegowuk chiefs have expressed concerns a First Nation candidate would not be competitive in a majority-francophone riding.

In August, the three-month-old commission recommended slicing both of Ontario's two northernmost ridings, Kenora—Rainy River and Timmins—James Bay, in half, aiming to boost Indigenous representation.

The other new riding, Kiiwetinoong, sits in the northwest, with a population of about 33,000, nearly 70 per cent of whom are Indigenous.

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