

TV Transcripts: Focus Ontario - December 10, 2017

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Focus Ontario: Auditor General Examines Government Waste In 2017 Report

Source: GLOBAL

Dec 10, 2017 11:30 AM (1)

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

Alan Carter, Host: A big week and a big show ahead. We're going to begin with a deep dive into the annual auditor general's report, otherwise known as Christmas for complainers.

Lisa MacLeod, PC MPP [clip]: The report describes a repulsive display of waste that would make any honest hardworking, taxpaying Ontarian cringe.

Alan: And away we go! That's the opposition reaction to the auditor's report, which comes out every year at this time of the year. Here is Bonnie Lysyk briefing reporters on Wednesday, talking about everything from teacher sick days to wait times for stem cell surgery. Now more on teacher sick days in just a moment. But first three quick highlights, starting with raccoons and the price of power.

Alan [clip]: Just so we're clear here, people in this province are paying \$30 million more a year for power than they should be?

Bonnie Lysyk, Ontario's Auditor General [clip end]: We do not believe that there is support for maintenance and operating cost to be covered under such a programme, and that equates to about \$30 million a year. So yes.

Alan: What the auditor discovered is some power companies under contract to the province have been gaming the system by submitting inappropriate expenses. Now some of the money has been recovered but about \$92 million was lost. And what are those inappropriate expenses? Well power companies were reimbursed for things like staff carwashes, scuba gear, parkas and traps to catch raccoons. The auditor found that all of these expenses including traps for 'Rocky' had nothing to do with running a power plant, yet millions of dollars ended up on Ontario hydro bills as a result.

Alan: But that might not be our biggest worry because the auditor also found that Ontario is not prepared for a large-scale emergency. Practicing for emergencies is key, but the report says the province only does that rarely. That's what you're looking at here, a fake, a mock emergency. And those emergency plans have not been updated since 2012 which means the latest information on climate change, cyberattacks and terrorism simply have not been considered. And finally, this important measure best message from your government.

[Hydro Ad]: Starting this summer, households in Ontario will receive an average of 25 per cent of their hydro.

Alan: The auditor found that government advertising under the Liberals has hit a 10-year high. \$58 million in the last year alone has been spent. Included in that, millions of dollars' worth of ads that the auditor says are too partisan and too self-congratulatory to the Wynne government.

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Focus Ontario: Teachers Taking More Sick Days, AG's Report

Source: GLOBAL

Dec 10, 2017 11:33 AM (2)

Alan Carter, Host: Now as mentioned, another issue raising eyebrows in the AG's report is a dramatic rise in teacher sick days. Shallima Maharaj reports.

Reporter: It's a sore spot in the auditor general's dissection of school board staff sick days.

Bonnie Lysyk, Ontario Auditor General: We're commenting that school boards perhaps need to put in place some sick leave policies and a programme to manage the sick leave so that they can minimize the cost to the overall school board budgets.

Reporter: A study commissioned by more than fifty boards found that average employee sick days and sick leave pay are up over a five year period. The auditor general narrowed the focus, honing in on four school boards: Toronto Catholic, Hamilton-Wentworth, Halton Catholic, Hastings and Prince Edward.

Lysyk: We're just saying school boards, you need to monitor this to make sure that a sick leave programme is in place that is followed that would stand our scrutiny.

Reporter: Three of the four schools saw salary costs paid to workers on sick leave soar from \$32.3 million in 2011/2012 to \$42.7 million in 2015/2016. Average sick days taken during that period ranged from eight to 13 days.

Mitzie Hunter, Ontario Education Minister: School boards have the responsibility to oversee attendance management.

Reporter: Toronto Catholic believes there's value in knowing why the sick days are being sought in the first place.

Rory McGuckin, Director of Education, Toronto Catholic District School Board: Perhaps by looking at the causes, we'll get a better sense of eliminating some of those sick days. We're working with an organization to try and get a better understanding of what might be contributing to those numbers. We are looking at implementing an employee assistance programme.

Reporter: Hamilton-Wentworth Board Chair Todd White chalks the numbers up to a particular moment.

Todd White, Chair of the Board, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board: We had through the last round of bargaining with the province, a change to the entitlement for our employees. Through that new structure, where you could no longer bank sick days, it had a bit of an unintended consequence.

Reporter: A consequence that's been costly to his board.

White: We saw a large increase in that one year. It has an impact on us of about \$3 to \$4 million in one year. Unfortunately, that's unfunded by the Ministry of Education.

Reporter: The auditor general meanwhile is advising the boards to come up with a plan to reverse the trend. Shallima Maharaj, Global News.

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Focus Ontario: Ontario Announces Major Reforms To Auto Insurance

Source: GLOBAL

Dec 10, 2017 11:35 AM (3)

Alan Carter, Host: Well also from Queen's Park this week: How much you pay for auto insurance, and two words that haunt Kathleen Wynne.

Premier Kathleen Wynne [clip]: You know we always knew it was a stretch goal, we always knew it was going to be a challenge.

Alan: That's the Premier describing a Liberal promise to bring down auto insurance rates in Ontario by 15 per cent. Now that was back in 2013 and so far rates are only down by about 8 per cent which is why every chance they get, opposition MPPs mention this.

Todd Smith, PC MPP [clip]: We heard the term "stretch goal" come from the auto insurance game before.

John Vanthof, NDP MPP [clip end]: Remember how the 15 per cent promise turned into a stretch goal?

Alan: There is a simple reason that lowering rates is a goal at all in Ontario, because according to the Ministry of Finance, we pay more than anyone else. In 2015, Ontario had the highest average premium at \$1,458. British Columbia second at just over \$1,300. At the lowest end of the scale, Quebec drivers pay an average of \$724 a year, exactly half almost of the Ontario rate. Now Ontario's Finance Minister Charles Sousa says there is a simple reason why we pay more. It's fraud!

Charles Sousa, Ontario Finance Minister [clip]: \$1.6 billion is our estimates of fraud in the system and unnecessary costs. Others assume it's even greater.

Alan: Now that fraud can be anything from faking an accident to overbilling for medical procedures. Here's what the Liberal government has announced to fight fraud: Standardized treatment for a common injuries like sprains, strains or whiplash. For more serious injuries, the province is going to establish independent and neutral examination centres. Plus, more teeth for enforcement with a new bureau focusing on auto insurance fraud. Now there is plenty in that to chew over. For example, standard treatment for common injuries.

MPP Vanthof [clip]: There is no standard accident. So we are concerned that if you have a standardization of treatment, that could lead to more problems than actually solve an issue.

Alan: Plus the soon-to-be established assessment centres where so-called independent and neutral doctors will determine a course of action but there will not be any services offered, will the public see those as neutral?

Gord Rasbach, Fraud Management at Aviva Canada [clip]: People right now are going to be suspicious of anything that comes out of this system because it's broken.

Alan: This former fraud investigator for the Toronto police now works for a major insurance company. Here's his assessment of the new plan.

Rasbach [clip]: It is totally in the right direction. In practice, I will wait until I actually see it before I believe it.

Alan: That is because there have been promises of a crackdown on fraud before and maybe that is why this announcement does not contain any specific targets because that might just be another –

Premier Kathleen Wynne [clip]: Stretch goal.

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Focus Ontario: Interview With Former Ontario Finance Minister On AG Report And Election

Source: GLOBAL
Dec 10, 2017 11:43 AM (6)

Alan Carter, Host: Are Ontario's books really in the black? An ongoing dispute over accounting practices has the Liberal government in this province at odds with Ontario's auditor general, who claims government employee pension plans should not be counted as assets. Well, you can bet my next guest has opinions on this. Dwight Duncan, a former Ontario finance minister and deputy premier, retired from provincial politics and now works at a law firm in Toronto. Welcome back to Focus.

Good to see you. Good to be back. What is your take on Bonnie Lysyk and whether or not the books are balanced or we have a \$4.5 billion whole.

Dwight Duncan, Former Ontario Finance Minister: She is wrong. An expert panel has concurred with the government. She is weighing in politically in my view, in a way that an auditor general ought not to do. She compromises the office which needs to be seen to be independent. She is an officer of the Legislative Assembly.

Alan: What would you advise Kathleen Wynne to do?

Duncan: Right now, there is not a lot you can do and she's employed by the legislature but if I were the legislature, I would be looking at a new auditor when her term comes up. I mean, she has even in her most recent report, taken out the government's response to things. We used to welcome the auditor general's report. If you go back and look, you'll see that all we said that we welcome the recommendations and by the time the report's been printed, we are already dealing with some of them. So it seems like there is more

politics going on here than actual good advice to the legislature.

Alan: This is so important because as we go into the election next year, whether or not we take the government's accounting or the auditor's accounting, it's a big difference, especially when you look at the Progressive Conservatives or whatever the New Democrats propose.

Duncan: Well the conservatives have adopted the government's accounting, which is wise on their part. They have acknowledged, I suspect, indirectly that the expert panel that the government has to weigh in on this and said the auditor general is not correct, they are wise to do that. The auditor general's report - as a former finance minister, I can tell you, I actually enjoyed getting it. There was times, there were things you didn't agree with. It's crafted around an embargo reports that's been building up for months.

Alan: It's what we call Christmas for complainers. It is never good for the government.

Duncan: No, no, but actually as a finance minister, it is a good day for the government and as a premier, it's a good day for the government. And as a senior public servant, it's a good day for the government.

Alan: Why do you suggest that this auditor has lowered the (inaudible)?

Duncan: Well, I have not read the 1,191 pages but her reflections and so on at the beginning, which I think is, I'm not interested in that. Her job is to point issues. Her predecessor was, in my view, always balanced, took into account the government's points of view, still produced some pretty tough reports for government to deal with. But we have seen, in my view, we have seen now at least two officers of the legislature who become, looks like they're more appealing to the media than the legislature.

Alan: You're talking about the former ombudsman?

Duncan: Mr. Marin had ongoing battles with the government. He ran politically after he left the independent office.

Alan: So did the Environmental Commissioner who ran for the Greens. I mean, should there be a ban against that?

Duncan: I don't think you can ban it, but I think what the legislature has to take into account is the proper role and function of these offices. What would happen for instance if you got an auditor general who was supportive of the government? You want an auditor general's immediate (inaudible) especially, who is not weighing in, in my view, politically.

Alan: Would you counsel Kathleen Wynne to use her majority to remove Bonnie Lysyk?

Duncan: Not at this point. It is too late into the term. I don't know when the auditor general's appointment is over but if I were a conservative Liberal or New Democrat, I would be looking at that. Because again, the conservatives are now in the position where they have had to embrace him and remember the government does not pull these numbers out of air. The same people that are in internal audit in government that serve the auditor general, the same senior officials, along with outside economists and advisors, work on this. And in this case, not to put too fine a point on it, the government went and got a panel of very independent experts and that panel concurred with the government's treatment.

Alan: We only have a minute left Dwight and I really want to move on to the "people's guarantee" and the hard move by the Progressive Conservatives to move right into the center of the road stop. You think that puts them in power in 2018?

Duncan: I would not underestimate Kathleen Wynne at this point. I remember 1995, we were in opposition at the time. We were 20 points ahead of the polls right up until the last two weeks. The Liberals have staked out a very Progressive agenda. They are working it very hard.

Alan: By which they have sidelined the NDP.

Duncan: And I wouldn't suggest they have given up the middle ground either at this point, I would suspect Lyn McLeod's campaign in 95 was called mushy. And I have heard the same language used by many of Mr. Brown's own supporters - or former supporters - the ultra-right party. So it will be very interesting. The Premier and the government have a difficult road ahead but I would not underestimate Kathleen Wynne. I have known her for many years. Listen, I'm a partisan. She is a good friend. But you know, they have staked out. This could be a very interesting election. And kudos to Brown. They have staked out some positions as well. Whether I agree with them or not, you are seeing an opposition leader who is starting to

put - his problem's going to be ultimately that so many things that he used to be changed. Kathleen Wynne, you know her, you know where she stands. And she always has been like that.

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