AFTERNOON MEDIA SCAN: BUDGET

April 28, 2017

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2017/04/28 13:23 - PostMedia
thestar.com
Section: News | Toronto Star
By: Ben SpurrJennifer Pagliaro
Published: 2017/04/28
Story ID: TOWO201704280042

TORONTO STAR: JOHN TORY SAYS WYNNE GOVERNMENT 'TURNED THEIR BACKS' ON TORONTO WITH 2017 BUDGET

Mayor John Tory has accused Premier Kathleen Wynne's government of turning its back on Toronto following a budget announcement that provided no new money for social housing repairs and failed to match federal commitments for transit.

"The most crucial needs of the people of the city of Toronto were not met by this budget," Tory told reporters a day after the province released a balanced budget that was touted for new drug coverage and increases to childcare. "Premier Kathleen Wynne and her government had a chance to stand up for Toronto on transit and on housing. Instead, at least on the pages of this budget, they turned their backs."

RELATED STORY:

Ontario Liberals reject Mayor John Tory's calls to match federal transit funding(https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2017/04/27/ontario-liberals-reject-mayor-john-torys-calls-to-match-federal-transit-funding.html)

Tory flatly admitted that without provincial funding, the transit projects that council has designated as its top priorities won't be completed. The recent federal budget committed what city officials estimate will be between $4.5 billion and $5 billion to pay up to 40 per cent of the cost of new transit projects.

The mayor had called on Queen's Park to match the federal funding, but his hopes were dashed with Thursday's budget announcement.

"Let's be clear, without matching dollars from the province, the relief line cannot be built," Tory said. "Waterfront transit will not be built. The Eglinton East LRT cannot be built."

The province is already investing billions of dollars in Toronto transit, including the Eglinton Crosstown and Finch West LRTs, and an expansion of GO Transit service that supports the mayor's SmartTrack plan.

Tory acknowledged these previous commitments but asserted that "decades of inaction on transit" means that "continuous investment" from Queen's Park is required.

"I don't think there's a single person you would find in the city of Toronto who would say we should just stop building transit now with the list of projects that we have and not bother going forward," he said.

Tory also said the province had failed to come forward with desperately needed cash for social housing repairs - that he expected the government to speak "clearly and with conviction" about the needs of those vulnerable residents.

He was disappointed.

"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."

By the end of next year, Toronto Community Housing is planning to have closed 1,000 units if more funds aren't secured. The budget for repairs in 2018 is currently $350 million short on cash, not including new federal funding committed, of which the details are still unknown.

Many of the buildings were previously downloaded by the province with a decades-long repairs backlog and no money in reserves to make amends.

"I just don't think that people thought that, as the federal government finally came through the door to say we're here to be part of transit and housing, that they expected to see the province on the way out the same door, kind of saying, 'Well, for the future, we don't really have any plans,'" Tory said.

The mayor said he trusted Wynne understood Toronto's needs, stopping short on Friday of blasting the premier for that inaction on the transit and housing files, after he had for months repeated that it would be a "grave mistake" for the province to do nothing in the wake of a reversal on allowing the city to toll its own expressways.

Speaking later in the day to reporters at Thorncliffe Park, Wynne said she was "disappointed" in Tory's analysis that the budget is shortchanging Toronto.

"When I look at the billions of dollars that we are investing in Toronto...we have made a significant, significant investment," she said, citing LRT lines on Finch and Sheppard Aves., the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, the Scarborough subway extension, upgrades to Union Station, and plans to give the city an additional $170 million in annual gas tax revenue.

"I know that Mayor Tory is talking about 'well, what comes next.' These are multi-year projects," she said.

Wynne said her government is also "very committed to both affordable and social housing," noting $130 million that can be used towards green energy retrofits, including for social housing. She did not address the ongoing request the province contribute a one-third share - or $864 million - for needed repairs to prevent the buildings from crumbling.

Council has designated four transit projects as its top priorities: the relief line subway, Waterfront LRT lines, the Eglinton East LRT, and Tory's SmartTrack plan. Together they will cost an estimated $13.6 billion.

Although the city has agreed to pay for SmartTrack without a direct provincial contribution, the other projects are mostly unfunded and the lack of money for them in Thursday's budget leaves them in limbo.

The shortfall for the $1.6-billion Eglinton East LRT in particular could prove politically problematic for Tory as it threatens to throw a wrench into the highly charged debate over Scarborough transit.

Tory pitched the LRT, which would be an extension of the Crosstown to the University of Toronto's Scarborough campus, as a part of package of Scarborough transit that includes the controversial one-stop subway extension to the Scarborough Town Centre.

The mayor originally said that both lines could be paid for using a $3.56 billion in funding previously secured from all three levels of government. However, since he first floated the plan in January 2016, the cost of the subway extension has ballooned by over $1 billion to $3.35 billion, leaving no money for the LRT.

Tory refused to concede that Scarborough could end up with just a single subway stop out of the plan, however, saying he would pressure Toronto Liberal MPPs to change the premier's mind.

"I'm not going to go to the place that says, well it's not going to get done - any one of these," he said. "I'm determined to see it built because it is part of the plan for Scarborough."

With files from Robert Benzie

2017/04/28 13:48 - PostMedia
Postmedia Breaking News
Section: Economy
By: Garry Marr
Published: 2017/04/28
Story ID: PBN_201704280119

National Post: *Ontario municipalities are getting new powers to tax hotels and hoteliers are furious*

Toronto hoteliers lashed out at provincial plans to give the city the power to tax hotels and other short-term accommodation providers like Airbnb.

The Greater Toronto Hotel Association noted any new tax would be added to the 13 per cent harmonized sales tax that is applied on all rooms in Ontario. The group added that tax has not been defined and has no cap, creating the possibility of "unprecedented highs" for hotel taxes in Canada's largest city.

"The introduction of a new hotel tax in Ontario has the potential to seriously reduce the competitiveness of Ontario's tourism sector. It is unclear why the tourism sector has been singled out for a tax increase," said Terry Mundell, chief executive of the GTHA.

Thursday's provincial budget included a plan to change the City of Toronto Act of 2006, in which the municipality was given broad power to level its own taxes but not impose a transient accommodation or hotel tax. The province also plans to amend the 2001 Municipal Act to allow single-tier and lower-tier municipalities to also levy the hotel tax.

"Toronto has been requesting it and we will be proceeding," finance minister Charles Sousa told journalists during a budget lockup.

The GTHA says the changes will have a ripple effect across the province and not just impact foreign tourists because 50 per cent of hotel room stays in the province are by Ontario residents.

A government official indicated that tax could be applied to other short-term accommodation services like the popular AirBnB.

All municipalities that adopt a hotel tax but also have an existing destination marketing fee would be required to share their hotel tax revenue with the appropriate not-for-profit tourism organization in an amount that matches the total revenue generated by the existing DMF program.

In local municipalities where there is no program, at least 50 per cent of their hotel tax revenue would be shared with the respective regional tourism organization or a not-for-profit tourism organization.

Patrick Brown, leader of the opposition Tories, slammed the tax. "It would be a Liberal government, a Liberal budget if it didn't include some form of a new tax," he said.

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2017/04/28 13:13 - PostMedia
ottawacitizen.com
Section: Columnists
By: Tyler Dawson, Ottawa Citizen
Published: 2017/04/28
Story ID: OTWO201704280044

Ottawa Citizen: The rental market is too important to let the market control it

Let there be no doubt about one thing: Rent control matters to millions of Ontarians, and the Liberal government is right to pursue housing reforms now part of the budget unveiled by Finance Minister Charles Sousa.

While the proposed 15-per-cent tax on foreign buyers has dominated the headlines, the most significant change for many in the province is the dismantling of the discriminatory 25-year-old law that exempted units built after 1991 from rent control. That law was fundamentally unfair because it created a two-tier rental market that gave one group of landlords the right to charge at will, while imposing caps on the other.

Expanding rent control to cover all private units, regardless of when they were built, no doubt levels the playing field. And that's good for renters.

The 1992 legislation in question was enacted in the belief that removing rent caps on new buildings would invigorate the home industry, and with rising profits, developers would be eager to build more rental units to meet rising demand.

But there's theory and there's reality. The truth is, the anticipated surge in rental construction never materialized. Developers built more and more condos that were not subject to rent control, but very little that was affordable.

"The reality is there hasn't been any more rental built, there have not been rental buildings built in any comprehensive way," Premier Kathleen Wynne said recently.

She is right. Still, the housing industry and some economists continue to insist that things work best when left to the market, and that any attempt at rent control will kill rental construction. "Even the very mention of rental control as an option is having a chilling effect on developers. From recent discussions with developers we know that it is already impacting decisions," CIBC economist Benjamin Tal wrote in a recent report.

But here's the thing: Developers had great incentive for 25 years to build and make the market work for renters but that didn't happen in any meaningful way. Now that they are being held accountable, builders are predicting doom and gloom to get their way.

This has become standard industry practice, and whether the issue is raising the minimum wage, protecting the environment and a host of others, the business sector resorts to wild predictions of economic disaster. For the most part, these "sky-will-fall" predictions are an excuse to maintain the status quo, but the thing is, we can't wait another 25 years for renters to get relief.

Remember that about 30 per cent of Ontario households rent - and many of them are hurting right now. As a society, we just can't say, "it's free enterprise so let the markets decide" and hope for the best. Somebody has to act to stabilize a market run amok, and the Liberal government is right to press ahead with reforms now laid out in the budget.

It is doubtful that the quality of life now enjoyed by the broad mass of people would have been as good as it is today, if Western societies had pinned their fates entirely to the dictates of the free market. Yes, governments should intervene as little as possible in the private sector. But there comes a time when government needs to step in and be the catalyst for change. On the housing crisis, the time is now.

The limited measures announced by the Liberals to deal with the problem are appropriate. The 16-point package is obviously not a silver bullet. It is only a start. There's more governments can do - such as reducing development charges, cutting the time for development approvals and making more public land available - to stimulate rental construction.

The problem today is largely Toronto's and some in other cities might think it's not their issue. But it could easily be Ottawa tomorrow, so we all have a stake in finding a solution. Fortunately, all three major parties at Queen's Park seem to agree on what needs to be done.

Let's implement these measures and build on them.

Related

Ontario's first balanced budget in decade promises billions in health care(http://ottawacitizen.com/news/politics/billions-in-health-care-in-balanced-ontario-budget)

The 2017 Ontario budget at a glance(http://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/the-2017-ontario-budget-at-a-glance)

Platt: Glory, hallelujah: Ontario has a balanced budget again(http://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/columnists/platt-glory-hallelujah-ontario-has-a-balanced-budget-again)

Mohammed Adam is an Ottawa writer.

2017/04/28 12:38 - PostMedia
thestar.com
Section: News | Toronto Star
By: Emily Mathieu
Published: 2017/04/27
Story ID: TOWO201704270153

TORONTO STAR: NO NEW CASH FOR FIXING SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK

Toronto's crumbling social housing stock will not receive any new money for desperately needed capital repairs as part of this year's provincial budget.

The budget lays out the early details of a plan to leverage government-owned land to encourage the development of more affordable housing units, but no new money towards affordable housing and homelessness prevention programs.

Toronto Community Housing Corp. is facing a $2.6 billion repair bill and plans to close 400 more homes next year, bringing to 1,000 the number of properties expected to close by 2018.

The province, as part of last year's budget, pledged $2 billion for affordable housing and housing supports, over three years.

"The complete absence of money for TCHC is a kick in the gut to the city of Toronto and the residents of Toronto Community Housing," Councillor Joe Cressy, who sits on the board for the social housing provider, told the Star's Jennifer Pagliaro.

Mayor John Tory, who previously called it a "grave mistake" for the province to ignore Toronto's funding needs, said in a statement: "The provincial government appears to have missed an opportunity to partner in the historic investments made by the federal government in much needed future transit expansion and repairs to our vital social housing."

Tory's housing advocate Councillor Ana Bailao, said she was disappointed by the budget.

"New affordable housing will not replace the social housing units that we have in Toronto," said Bailao, in a statement. "Every single corner of this city has urgent social housing repair needs."

"It's concerning that there's no mention at all about this . . . It would have been an important signal to have in there."

As part of Thursday's announcement, the province laid out the early details of a new plan to leverage between $70 million and $100 million worth of provincial land to build up to 2,000 affordable housing units, by selling off surplus land at below market value to encourage and facilitate future development.

That plan will "complement" an existing plan to create community hubs, which will also use land assets to "advance community use of public properties," provided a solid business case can be made for its use, in that respect.

David Waters, president of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, Ontario Region, welcomed the decision by the province to leverage land to speed up development, particularly in increasingly unaffordable urban markets.

"Right now, more than ever, it's good to see the province using all the tools at its disposal to build affordable housing," said Waters in a statement.

The province will be working with cities, the federal government, people from the housing sector and other interested stakeholders to firm up the plans this spring.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath said the 2017 provincial budget "doesn't even come close" to undoing the damage the Liberal government has caused over the last 14 years. Premier Kathleen Wynne, said Horwath, was "choosing to look away" from the needs of people across the province, particularly when it came to health care, rising hydro costs and social housing.

"Under the Wynne Liberals, housing costs have skyrocketed, while subsidized housing stock has been allowed to crumble, been shuttered and sold off," said Horwath.

In Toronto, as part of previous budget commitments and as part of the Climate Change Action Plan, the city will receive $130 million for energy retrofits for social housing and more than $340 million, also over three years, in rent supports and other services to prevent homelessness.

The city is also receiving about $130 million through the Investment in Affordable Housing program, used to provide supports to keep people in their homes, like rent supplements.

The province has also committed $200 million, to be spent over three years, to help 6,000 families and people across Ontario get access to housing assistance programs, including counselling, assistance with medication and life skills training, and to support the construction of 1,500 new supportive housing units.

Survivors of domestic violence will be provided with $30 million to be spent over the next three years, to support up to 3,000 people, through a portable housing benefit.

About $90 million has also been placed into the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiatives (CHPI) fund, which is distributed to municipalities for homelessness prevention initiatives, including rent supplements.

Any funding tied to affordable housing and homelessness prevention is being carefully watched in the buildup to the forthcoming National Housing Strategy.

In March, the federal government promised $11.2 billion for affordable housing initiatives and programs, to be spent over 11 years. Roughly $3 billion of that total was to be spent in the next five years, with $20 million for this year.

Housing advocates, in March, called the federal commitment a strong step forward in easing what is widely recognized as a countrywide crisis.

The $11.2 billion is on top of baseline funding for expiring social housing agreements. That operating agreement funding is expected to be maintained up to 2028.

In early April, Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, announced the creation of a $5 billion national housing fund, designed to keep Canada's most vulnerable housed, including people living with mental health issues, struggling with addictions, seniors, and veterans.

That fund also includes targeted money for Indigenous communities, on and off reserve.

With files from Jennifer Pagliaro

Clarification-April 28, 2017: This article was edited from a previous version that mistakenly referred to David Waters as the president of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada.

2017/04/28 10:33 - PostMedia
Postmedia Breaking News
Section: Full Comment
By: Kelly McParland
Published: 2017/04/28
Story ID: PBN_201704280068

National Post: Kelly McParland: The latest Ontario budget puts the Liberals ahead of the voters ... but will the voters care?

There was one goal above all others for Thursday's Ontario's budget: to halt the water that has been flooding into this Titanic of a government and keep it from sinking from sight.

This is a government that has been desperate for good news. Attempts to prevent Premier Kathleen Wynne's poll ratings from dropping towards single digits have failed. A much ballyhooed pledge to reduce astronomical hydro bills produced no bump in the ratings. Though much has been made of Donald Trump's underwhelming performance in his first 100 days as president, and the growing sense of disillusion among his supporters, his 44 per cent approval rating is 32 points above Wynne's standing in Ontario.

Finance Minister Charles Sousa's budget had to stop the bleeding. There was simply no alternative. By whatever means possible, a positive message had to be concocted that could be spun out over the province's disgruntled inhabitants, somehow convincing them to give the tired, old Liberal regime yet another chance. It had to be simple, straightforward, and bullet-proof enough that the local media could be gulled into repeating it in the headlines that are all most people will read when it comes to budget stories.

To that degree, Sousa succeeded. "Ontario balances budget, pours billions into health care," the Globe and Mail announced, just as the government must have prayed. "Ontario Budget 2017: Balanced Books for Ontario, and free drugs for those under 24," the CBC reported. The Toronto Star (well, we knew the Liberals could count on the Star) editorialized: "Wynne government promises much-needed investment in child care." The Star, as you'd expect, faithfully treats new government outlays as "investments" rather than more of the spending that has left the province $312 billion in hock.

There haven't been a lot of noteworthy achievements in Western politics of late, but - as the budget demonstrated - great strides have been made in understanding and manipulating media messaging. Sure, most of the articles about Sousa's plan eventually got around to noting the many gaping holes in the document. The budget claims to be "balanced" even though debt will rise another $26.4 billion this fiscal year. Debt servicing costs will again eat up $1 billion a month, topping all but the highest priority programs. Even to reach those dubious levels, a great deal of hocus pocus was required: billions of dollars in expenditures for capital projects are kept off the books; billions more in borrowing is shoved into the future; one-off asset sales like the Hydro One sell-off are used to make the numbers look better than they are.

But Ontarians who care already knew that state of affairs. And look(http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/free-abortion-pill-cash-for-boobs-and-babies-top-23-takeaways-from-the-ontario-budget)at the goodies on offer: free abortion pills! A transit credit for seniors! More childcare spaces and ... did we mention this already? ... a 25 per cent cut to electricity bills, which is really a 17 per cent cut, and will actually cost the province billions down the road, but who's counting? By this time next year will Ontario's easily-swayed voters remember any of the dirty details of the budget or the flim-flam used to manufacture its bottom line? Not likely. But they won't be allowed to forget the government's claim to have balanced the books, because the Liberal party will spend heavily to keep it on the airwaves (possibly using public funds on the premise that the government has a responsibility to keep residents informed of its activities).

Sousa insists the books will remain in the black for three more years, thanks in part to greater land transfer taxes from Toronto's ballooning housing prices. The $3.1 billion a year he expects(http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/2017-ontario-budget-details/article34832592/)to gain might explain why the Liberals took so long to respond to demands for efforts to cool the market, which has even prosperous, fully-employed families struggling to find a home they can afford.

Many of the news reports pointed out that this was an election document, meant to present the government in the best light and win over voters even though the Liberals still have a year before they have to face voters. Of course it is. Its overwhelming purpose was to protect the interests of the Liberal party, even if it means chaining the province to the benevolence of its lenders and gambling the future on interest rate levels.

That has long been the Liberal way, and it has kept them in power for almost 14 years. Against all the odds they might even stay there, as long as Ontarians continue to swallow the sort of humbug they were presented with Thursday.

National Post

2017/04/28 10:23 - PostMedia
thespec.com
Section: News
Published: 2017/04/28
Story ID: HBWO201704280034

Hamilton Spectators: *Ontario smokers slapped with a $2 price hike on cartons*

Smokers in Ontario will have to dip further into their pockets for a pack of cigarettes following a hike in tobacco taxes, announced in Thursday's tabling of the provincial budget.

Tobacco taxes will rise $2 per carton as of midnight Thursday. The rate is set to rise to $10 over the next three years.

The tax increase comes in a move to "accelerate Ontario's goal of having the lowest smoking rates in Canada," according to the budget report.

[More on the 2017 budget]

"Ontario has very low tax rates ... It's the province with the second lowest tobacco tax rates, only after Quebec, in the country," said Michael Perley, director of Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco.

"Tax increases are our number one weapon, if you will, in the fight against tobacco industry products, so we're very pleased about that," he said.

Tobacco products on the contraband market could face higher enforcement measures as well. The government also announced proposed amendments to the Tobacco Tax Act that seek to ban the supply of cigarette filter components, including acetate tow, to registered manufacturers.

"That's important because most smokers smoke filtered cigarettes," Perley said.

Gary Grant, spokesperson of the National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco, said the tax hike will drive smokers to the contraband market, adding that the provincial government needs to step up enforcement measures through police investigations.

"If you are going to increase cigarette taxes significantly, you should also be making some significant steps to stop the contraband trade."

2017/04/28 10:08 - PostMedia
thestar.com
Section: News | Toronto Star
By: Kristin RushowyLaurie Monsebraaten
Published: 2017/04/27
Story ID: TOWO201704270142

Toronto Star: Ontario budget puts focus on children's well-being

From pharmacare to daycare to child welfare, Ontario kids got a lot of attention in the provincial budget.

The Liberals are pledging a further $49 million for children's mental health and wellness, mainly through school-based programs.

Those funds, spread over three years, are to "improve students' cognitive, emotional, social and physical development through equity and inclusive education, safe and accepting schools, healthy schools and positive mental health," Ontario budget documents said.

Some 70 per cent of adults who suffer from mental health issues report their troubles began when they were young.

The $134 million promised for child welfare will be spent over the next four years. The funds come as the government revamps the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, which it has promised will give kids in provincial care more of a say in the decisions that affect them.

The government is also putting $200 million in new operating funds that will create 24,000 additional daycare spaces this year - 16,000 of them subsidized for low- to moderate-income families.

Experts say they are cautiously optimistic about the announcement, part of the government's plan for 100,000 new spaces over the next five years.

"I think that putting money into the subsidy systems, where wait lists are so long, is the right thing to do in the short term," said Martha Friendly, executive director of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

"This will not only help parents, but centres with vacancies they can't fill."

However, she added "everything we know shows that individual subsidies are not the solution to fixing child care, so I'm really glad they are committing to a broader affordability plan."

In Toronto, about 15,400 children are waiting for daycare subsidies while more than 4,000 spaces sit vacant because parents can't afford fees that top $20,000 a year for young children.

Friendly said she looks forward to hearing about other aspects of the five-year plan, expected to be released later in May.

"I'm hopeful that that will really be something that we can work with," she said. "(I'm) enthusiastic about getting started."

Riverdale-area mother Shiralee Hudson Hill and her husband, who pay more than $30,000 a year in child care fees for their daughters Cressida, 4 and Imogen, 1, are also anxious to hear about the government's broader affordability plan.

"When I look at what was released today, I'm not really seeing anything that will help my family and many of my friends," said Hudson Hill, 40, an AGO exhibition planner. "Middle-class families are being kneecapped by these massive daycare fees."

Hudson Hill also welcomes the government's plan to beef up children's mental health services through new school-based programs.

"Mental health is an issue that has touched so many families and in some cases, tragically," she said. "The sooner we can address those issues with professional help in schools, the better."

Hudson Hill, whose mother was a teacher, said this was a role that used to be played by the school nurse and guidance counsellors, positions that were gutted during the Conservative Mike Harris government in the mid-1990s. "I see this as an important reinvestment, updated for the times."

The province is also moving ahead with hubs - or one-stop shops - for teens and young adults needing mental health help or support for addictions, setting up nine across Ontario.

CBC.CA: *Ontario budget leaves mercury cleanup near Grassy Narrows First Nation 'in doubt', chief says*

CBC.CA News
Fri Apr 28 2017, 12:56pm ET
Section: Thunder Bay
Byline: CBC News

The 2017 provincial budget falls short on commitments to clean up mercury contamination in the English-Wabigoon River that's poisoning residents of two northwestern Ontario First Nations, the chief of Grassy Narrows First Nation says.

"This budget leaves the future of my people in doubt," Chief Simon Fobister said in a news release issued Friday. "There is nothing in here for cleaning the river that is our life-blood, and nothing for the healing of our people."

Fobister called on Premier Kathleen Wynne to "stand by her word," and enter into a binding agreement with the community to clean up the river that flows through Grassy Narrows and Wabaseemoong First Nations.

Mercury was dumped into the river by Reed Paper, upstream in Dryden, Ont., in the 1960s and early 1970s.

That has resulted in more than 90 per cent of the population in the communities showing signs of mercury poisoning, according to research released in September, 2016 by Japanese experts who have been studying the health of people there for decades.

The commercial fishery in Grassy Narrows was also forced to close due to the contamination, crippling the community's economy.

In February, the province announced it would find and remediate all the mercury pollution in the river.

- 'Guilt' drives former Dryden, Ont. mill worker to reveal his part in dumping toxic mercury

Grassy Narrows supported a plan submitted to the province by renowned mercury scientist John Rudd detailing how to begin cleaning the river by spring, 2018, the community's written release stated.

In addition, Grassy Narrows's leadership wants to see the full clean-up cost accounted for in the provincial budget, with funds to do the work placed in a trust.

Continued commitment to cleanup, studies ongoing: Ontario government

While there is no new money in the budget earmarked for the English-Wabigoon River cleanup, government officials say that doesn't mean no work is being done.

$2.1 million has been committed for necessary studies in advance of cleanup work, said Gary Wheeler, a spokesperson for Ontario's environment ministry in an email to CBC News, adding that the money is in addition to $410,000 already set aside.

The province continues to work with Grassy Narrows on a work plan proposal and scientists will be back on the river this summer to do more research, he continued.

"There are many opportunities to continue to work together to identify and provide the resources needed to deliver on our commitment," he said, adding that "this work will continue."

cbcn

CBC.CA: *'LIKE CHRISTMAS IN APRIL': BUDGET MEANS MEGA-HOSPITAL MOVING AHEAD, SAYS MUSYJ*

CBC.CA News
Fri Apr 28 2017, 12:38pm ET
Section: Windsor
Byline: CBC News

Windsor's mega-hospital project is moving ahead thanks to billions of dollars for health care in Ontario's budget and appealing the proposed location would be a "waste of time and money," says Windsor Regional Hospital CEO David Musyj.

A total of $9 billion in the budget was earmarked for new hospital projects, including one for Windsor.

"Some of the most important work is done in the upcoming stages to make sure we get it right when it comes to planning how the hospitals will operate and what is required to make then not only supportive of today's patient population, but for generations to come," said Musyj, who described the budget as "Christmas in April."

In a news release, officials from area hospitals said including a Windsor hospital in the budget meant "decision makers heard loud and clear that Windsor-Essex supports this once in a lifetime, desperately needed transformation" for healthcare in the area.

Before proposals for the project can be accepted, the hospitals require a signed agreement from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hospital won't open for 7-10 years

The planning stages will require "10 times" the work and money of the first stage, according to the release, meaning the new hospital probably won't accept its first patient for seven to 10 years.

The process of rezoning for the mega-hospital site near County Road 42 and the 9th Concession is underway and the public will have more opportunities to weigh in on what they want the hospital to look like.

Criticism from community group

While hospital officials are celebrating the budget announcement as affirmation of the mega-hospital's proposed location, community groups including Citizens for An Accountable Mega-Hospital Process (CAMPP) argue the location is still up for debate.

"Ontario Ministry of Health and Policy Advisors assured us in several recent conference calls that the funding for the hospital being announced is not an approval of the proposed site," wrote spokesperson Philippa von Ziegenweidt in a statement.

She added CAMPP was "thrilled" to see Ontario invest in Windsor, but expected the coming stages of the mega-hospital plan will show the "serious shortcomings of the proposed location."

Musyj said he would prefer if people in the area would put their energy towards making a "positive impact" on the project instead of wasting time and money appealing its location.

"We can't make everybody happy," he added."By moving forward we are done with site selection."

cbcn

CBC.CA: *IMPROVED RAIL BETWEEN WATERLOO REGION AND TORONTO 'IMMENSE PRIORITY' FOR PCS, MPP HARRIS SAYS*

CBC.CA News
Fri Apr 28 2017, 11:32am ET
Section: Kitchener-Waterloo
Byline: CBC News

The provincial budget was short on details when it came to funding for two-way, all-day GO between Kitchener-Waterloo and Toronto, said MPP Mike Harris.

Harris, the MPP for Kitchener-Conestoga and the Progressive Conservative transportation critic, said the provincial budget released Thursday lacked any real specifics on a very necessary rail corridor.

As well, the Liberals failed to address high speed rail between Windsor and Toronto.

"They commit to continuing the discussion," Harris said, in an interview with Craig Norris on The Morning Edition Friday.

He said the movement of people between Waterloo region and Toronto "is an immense priority for us."

Liberals need to provide more specifics

Waiting until 2024, which is the Liberal plan, is not soon enough, he added.

PC Leader Patrick Brown has been to Waterloo region and has heard the concerns from tech companies about the need for rail service, Harris said.

"We have heard them loud and clear, easier access, faster access to the GTA is imperative. Not only into the GTA, but also back into the region back in the morning. There is still not rail option to date to come from Union [Station] to Kitchener-Waterloo," Harris said.

"It is top of the priority list to get people in and out of our region to Toronto and back for the Ontario PCs."

Investments 'can take time'

Kitchener Mayor Berry Vrbanovic was pleased with the budget and its mention of technical analysis underway for two-way, all-day GO trains between the region and Toronto's Union Station and a comprehensive environmental assessment and planning work for a high speed rail line from Windsor to Toronto.

"These investments can take time to realize their full potential. With an eye on economic growth over the long term, this budget continues to make progress on these and other areas," Vrbanovic said in a statement after the budget Thursday.

"This continued commitment in the rail corridor will, in time, alleviate congestion in both directions and drive economic growth for Ontario and the country."

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CBC.CA: *Seniors not forgotten in Ontario budget, minister says*

CBC.CA News
Fri Apr 28 2017, 10:42am ET
Section: Toronto
Byline: CBC News

Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa defended the spring budget on Friday, saying the province is providing for seniors as well as youth, despite its announcement of free prescription drugs for people 24 and under.

Sousa told Metro Morning that the $465 million pharmacare plan announced Thursday, which would cover prescription medications to treat most acute and common chronic conditions for children and young adults, does not shortchange seniors in any way.

"We want our seniors to live with dignity and respect and comfortably, obviously," Sousa said by telephone.

"I'm proud that, we as a government, we're investing $11.5 billion more in health care generally throughout the system. Much of that will support seniors."

The finance minister said the budget contains several measures specifically designed to help seniors.

According to budget documents, the province will spend $100 million over three years to help people with dementia. It will spend $58 million more for long-term care homes, which is a two per cent increase. It will also create a public transit tax credit for seniors. And it will increase the food allowance for residents of long-term care homes by six per cent.

When asked about the pharmacare plan age limit, Sousa said the province chose to limit prescription drug coverage for young people at 24 because that is the age when many young people enter the full-time work force.

"Many of them may be on contract up to until that point. We felt it was a good start. At that age, we're covering all of our young people," he said.

Under the pharmacare plan, which starts in January 2018, the government would pay for 4,400 medicines currently covered under the Ontario Drug Benefit program. That program provides prescription drug coverage to more than 2.3 million seniors and about 900,000 people receiving social assistance.

Sousa said the provincial government has been working on the youth pharmacare plan for months. He said the Liberals would like the federal government and other provinces to follow suit.

"We've been working on this for some time. It was already in the budget, it was already at the printer, when the NDP came up with the idea on Sunday," he said.

With files from Metro Morning

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GLOBE AND MAIL: *GLOBE EDITORIAL: ONTARIO'S NDP-LITE BUDGET SETS THE TABLE FOR THE NEXT ELECTION; THE BUDGET THAT ONTARIO FINANCE MINISTER CHARLES SOUSA DELIVERED ON THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 2017, IS ALL ABOUT AN EVENT HAPPENING ON THURSDAY, JUNE 7, 2018: THE NEXT PROVINCIAL ELECTION. THE PROVINCE'S LIBERAL GOVERNMENT CURRENTLY STANDS A DISTANT*

theglobeandmail.com
Thu Apr 27 2017, 6:00pm ET
Section: Other

The budget that Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa delivered on Thursday, April 27, 2017, is all about an event happening on Thursday, June 7, 2018: The next provincial election. The province's Liberal government currently stands a distant second or third in the polls; those same opinion surveys have saddled Premier Kathleen Wynne with the moniker of "Canada's least popular premier." Her personal approval rating is so low that for months, there's been widespread talk about a panicked party pushing her into retirement.

But don't count out the Liberals or Ms. Wynne just yet. Not by a long shot. Election after election since 2003, they've figured out how to win back voters, with more than a little help from Ontario's Progressive Conservatives, who are past masters at figuring out how to lose them. Team Wynne still has a lot of tricks up its sleeve - and more ammunition than ever in its fiscal arsenal.

Nine years after Great Recession hit, Ontario's budget is back in balance. After winning the election in 2014, the Liberals promised to eliminate the deficit before voters next went to the polls. Their two-stage plan has largely worked as expected.

Explainer: Ten things you need to know about the Ontario budget (www.theglobeandmail.com»)

How did they do it? Step one, spending restraint. Yes, really. For the last three years, Liberal rhetoric has been designed to convince voters that they've been as busy giving away money as the Tooth Fairy. In fact, they've spent the last three years wrestling down expenses in health and education, the two largest government departments.

Spending increases there have been held well below inflation plus population growth - not an easy trick when teachers unions are your allies, or given that Ontario already spends less per person on health than any province except Quebec. The Liberals brought in austerity-lite, while trying to deny it. And for the budget to balance, they had to.

Step two, revenue growth: Over the last few years, the economy has grown faster than expected, and tax revenues, including a land transfer tax powered by a hot housing market, and a big scoop from the new tax-like cap-and-trade system, greatly outpaced growth in expenditures. Revenues growing faster than spending equals, right on the electoral schedule, a balanced budget.

If the budget remains balanced in the years to come - that's what the Liberals are promising, though some economists and the province's Fiscal Accountability Office have raised questions about the details - the relative size of the province's debt, known at the debt-to-GDP ratio, will slowly but steadily fall. That would be a real and substantial accomplishment.

It's also valuable political currency. That's why PC leader Patrick Brown, the man whose election this is to lose, responded to Thursday's budget by insisting that taxes and spending are still out of control, and Liberal accounting shenanigans are covering up the fact that the government is deep in deficit. New Democratic Party leader Andrea Horwath, in contrast, handed out a press release headlined: "Wynne's Budget Doesn't Undo The Damage She's Done."

It was Why Haven't You Cut More vs. Why Have You Cut So Much. The Liberals are aiming to walk to victory, right up the middle.

But the Wynne government's plan to win again in 2018 is mostly not about competing with the Tories for votes. Beyond eliminating the deficit, the budget doesn't use Tory language. Instead, it's about winning re-election by eating the NDP's lunch.

For three years, the Liberals have been implementing austerity-lite, while insisting that they are actually Santa Claus. Now that Ontario's in balance, they're talking more than ever like Saint Nick, but they've finally got more gifts to hand out, to key constituencies: young voters, seniors, lower income Ontarians, the education sector, anyone who cares about health care, and anyone steaming over their hydro bill.

The Liberals are shifting from austerity-lite to NDP-lite.

For example, the NDP has been calling for a province-wide pharmacare plan - free prescription drugs for everyone. The Liberal budget cribs from the NDP by going part way there, offering free drugs for anyone under the age of 24. The Liberals have long been pushing for a national pharmacare program, and the province already covers drugs for seniors and those on welfare, more than a quarter of the population. But the sudden arrival of free drugs for children and youth still feels like a last minute addition to the fiscal plan. Finance Minister Charles Sousa told reporters it will cost $465-million a year, but that figure is nowhere to be found in the budget itself.

Seniors? The federal Liberals eliminated the boutique tax credit for riding public transit; their provincial cousins have brought it back - for anyone over the age of 65.

Young voters? The province's program for assisting college and university students, OSAP, will become both simpler and more generous. This was announced last year, but it doesn't start to kick in until this fall and next year. The Liberals say the vast majority of students from families earning less than $90,000 will now receive grants that meet or exceed the cost of tuition.

Health? The province really has been squeezing health spending since the last election, with annual increases of barely more than 2 per cent over the last two years - well below inflation plus population growth. This coming year, however, health spending is budgeted to rise by 3 per cent, and then by nearly 5 per cent the year after.

And whereas governments used to focus on streamlining health care by closing hospitals, the Liberals are trumpeting all the new facilities they are building or planning.

More daycare spaces? Yes - though fewer than the NDP is demanding.

Housing? As announced earlier this month, the Liberals are using the housing price bubble as an excuse to expand rent control - an economically self-defeating policy, and one having absolutely nothing to do with the housing bubble, but which will please more than a few renters nonetheless.

Hydro? One of the most expensive new commitments, announced before the budget, is the government's plan to use your taxes to lower your hydro bill. Price: $1.4 billion a year. Governments can do all sorts of dumb things when they're feeling flush.

And for all that, this budget often tries to act like it's spending more than it is; the government's health care increases, which are modest but real, get creatively double- and triple-counted. Health spending is budgeted to grow from $52.2-billion in 2016 to $58.1 billion in 2019, and that is repeatedly referred to as "increasing by $11.5-billion over three years."

And the long-term infrastructure plan, most of which is scheduled to happen years from now, and which exists almost entirely outside the annual operating budget, never stops growing, at least rhetorically. Two years ago it was a ten year, $130-billion infrastructure program. Last year, it had become a 12-year, $160-billion program. Now it's described as a 13-year, $190-billion infrastructure plan.

The bottom line is that the current state of Ontario's finances offers big opportunities for the Liberals, and serious challenges for the PCs and the NDP.

The NDP, whose voters are the Liberal target, of course say they hate this budget. But with its balanced bottom line and big new commitments to social spending, it feels like a fiscal plan another NDP party - the 2015 federal NDP, led by Thomas Mulcair - would have loved.

Follow this link to view this story on globeandmail.com: (www.theglobeandmail.com»)

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CBC.CA: *DUELLING DRUG PLANS SET STAGE FOR PHARMACARE ELECTION IN ONTARIO*

CBC.CA News
Fri Apr 28 2017, 5:16am ET
Section: Toronto
Byline: CBC News

Pharmacare is poised to become an election issue in Ontario, with Premier Kathleen Wynne promising free prescription drugs for children and young adults in Thursday's budget, and the NDP rolling out its own version earlier this week,

The two drug programs differ in some key aspects, but they share a crucial political effect: putting the Progressive Conservatives and their leader Patrick Brown on the spot.

Voters are likely to compare the NDP and Liberal plans to see how they measure up, and for now will just have to wonder what the PCs will propose.

"I would have a drug access plan that is fair," Brown told reporters during a news conference Thursday, but offered no specifics. "Of course everyone wants greater drug coverage. The question I would ask is, I want to make sure those precious taxpayer dollars are going to the people that really need it."

The NDP's drug plan, which it unveiled on Saturday, would cover people of all ages, but would only include 125 different types of prescription medication.

The Liberal drug plan, laid out in Thursday's budget, would only cover people age 24 and under, yet would cover some 4,400 medications ? every prescription drug covered by the existing Ontario Drug Benefit Plan for seniors and people with lower incomes.

"There are many people who can't afford to buy the drugs that are prescribed for their kids, so that's why we're making this change," Wynne told CBC Toronto News host Dwight Drummond in an interview Thursday.

"It's about providing pharmacare for more people, and what better way to start than with our most vulnerable," Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa said Thursday in a news conference.

- Ontario NDP promises pharmacare if elected in 2018

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath dismissed the Liberal plan as a "half measure."

"This small measure that the government has put forward in the budget isn't nearly what it should be," Horwath told a news conference Thursday. "All I can think of is they made it up on the back of a napkin."

'Why cover rich kids' drugs?'

The NDP's plan will, of course, only come to pass if the New Democrats win the 2018 election. Meanwhile, the Liberals will roll out their drug plan in January, six months before Ontarians go to the polls.

That will give them an advantage: not just in campaigning on a promise of pharmacare, but because voters will see how the plan works. Lots of voters, too: there are four million children and young adults under the age of 25.

The Liberals are defending their decision to make the drug plan open to everyone in the age group, regardless of family income. During Thursday's news conference, a reporter asked "Why should a millionaire's child have their drugs covered by taxpayers?"

"You want to income test, and we're not doing that when it comes to our children," Sousa replied. "Universal health care applies to everybody equally."

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CBC.CA: *COUNCILLORS BLAST LACK OF SOCIAL HOUSING FUNDING IN PROVINCIAL BUDGET*

CBC.CA News
Fri Apr 28 2017, 5:00am ET
Section: Toronto
Byline: CBC News

Toronto city councillors are blasting the lack of funding for social housing in Ontario's budget.

Mayor John Tory is set to provide his reaction to the province's budget on Friday morning, after backing out of speaking with reporters hours after the budget was released at Queen's Park on Thursday. In a statement, Tory said he made his expectations clear, but the Liberals didn't deliver.

That expectation was for some $860 million to help repair crumbling Toronto Community Housing (TCH) buildings. But the budget contains little new funding.

Coun. Ana Bailao says while there are some measures to make housing more affordable in the city, the province is ignoring its "shared responsibility" to help TCH.

"Right now, we don't have a partner for the social housing issue in the provincial government," said Bailao, who chairs the city's affordable housing committee.

On Twitter, Coun. Joe Cressy called it simply: "a kick in the gut."

And Coun. Josh Matlow, who has also criticized the city for not doing more on social housing, said the lack of funding hurts even more as it comes on the heels of council shuttering a TCH complex in the Jane and Finch area due to disrepair.

Toronto is spending some $250 million on social housing this year.

City hoping province will match federal money in the future

Budget Chief Gary Crawford said he was hoping the province would clearly indicate that it would match future federal housing funding ? something Finance Minister Charles Sousa may have done in a response to a reporter inside the lockup.

"We've already said that we'll match a degree of capital funding for the work that's being done by the federal government," Sousa said.

Crawford said he'd like to see that in writing.

"We're going to be hoping that there may be some new pages that we haven't seen at this point," he said.

Sousa also said the province is investing some $2 billion to help with housing in the city, however that money is being spent over a three-year span and includes funding for affordable housing projects, social housing and anti-homelessness measures.

TCH, meanwhile, declined to comment on the provincial budget.

Toronto did get some new powers in the budget, including the ability to levy a hotel and Airbnb tax. The city is also expected to get a large share of the 24,000 child-care spaces the province is set to open this year.

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CBC.CA: *'WE'RE HURTING': SUDBURY HOSPITAL UNION PRESIDENT CALLS FOR MORE BEDS, STAFF*

CBC.CA News
Fri Apr 28 2017, 5:07am ET
Section: Sudbury
Byline: CBC News

The Ontario government is raising funding for hospitals by three per cent in the 2017 budget.

But France Gelinas, Nickel Belt MPP and provincial NDP health critic, said a five per cent hike is needed just to maintain services.

"I'll let you do the math," Gelinas said.

"It means they won't be able to maintain what is already unacceptable."

The budget increase means $518 million more for hospitals in annual operating funding.

'We're hurting'

The union president for clerical and service workers at the hospital in Sudbury, Ont., calls it a step in the right direction, but hopes it helps with workloads and translates into more front line staff and patient beds.

"We're hurting," Dave Shelefontiuk of CUPE Local 1623 said.

"I'm hoping any increase will result in alleviating that issue, but we'll have to wait and see."

There are not any measures in this year's budget to directly address the problem of patients lying on stretchers for days in the hallways waiting for beds.

But Finance Minister Charles Sousa insists a $7 billion boost to health care over the next three years will reduce pressure on the system.

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CBC.CA: *ONTARIO BUDGET 2017: LEAVE YOUR INSURANCE SLIP AT HOME, CAR INSURANCE 'PINK SLIPS' TO GO MOBILE*

CBC.CA News
Fri Apr 28 2017, 5:00am ET
Section: Toronto
Byline: CBC News

Several government services and your auto insurance slips are making the move to online and mobile platforms, as announced in Thursday's budget.

Here are some of the key things you'll have access to, starting this year:

- Drivers will be allowed to provide proof of insurance "pink slips" on their mobile phone.

- Plan to move "yellow card" immunization records online for parents and guardians.

- Online referral system that connects patients to specialists will be expanded to five regions.

- Free online access to 5,000 eLearning courses on LinkedInLynda.com for students.

- Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP) will move to an online application process.

- Simplified access to online renewal of drivers' licenses and address changes.

- Previously announced public psychotherapy for mental health issues to be available online.

Home
ANALYSIS
CBC.CA: *THE BUDGET THAT JUST MIGHT SAVE KATHLEEN WYNNE: ROBERT FISHER*
Robert Fisher's Ontario political analysis appears here every two weeks
By Conrad Collaco, CBC News Posted: Apr 28, 2017 10:45 AM ET Last Updated: Apr 28, 2017 11:25 AM ET

One thing's for sure about Thursday's Ontario budget from the Liberal government. You shouldn't expect Premier Kathleen Wynne to go away any time soon.

CBC's Ontario political analyst Robert Fisher says the Premier has been underestimated all her political life and her latest budget might turn public opinion back in her favour.

Fisher spoke with the CBC's Conrad Collaco about the provincial government's new budget. Listen to the full interview by clicking the image at the top of the page, or read an edited and abridged transcript below.

We knew the Liberals were going to introduce spending measures after balancing the books including hydro rate cuts and measures to cool the housing market. Was there anything that surprised you in the budget?

The day before the budget the finance minister was telling reporters, without giving details, that the best was yet to come in the budget. They had already rolled out their plan on housing so they needed something to get people's attention. And that's pharmacare. While the health minister was fairly complimentary of Andrea Horwath and the NDP move on pharmacare there was no indication the government was ready to take on pharmacare. This is a big deal. Politically speaking it kneecaps the NDP and forces Patrick Brown and the Conservatives to address an issue that he might have ignored.

Ontario budget 2017: Balanced books for Ontario, and free drugs for those 24 and younger

Now he must come up with his own plan. Pharmacare will become a major issue in the next election. It has boxed the two parties in. This is now part of the footprint of Ontario. The other parties are going to have to follow. Maybe they were going to do it anyway but the urgency came because the NDP plan was gaining traction with voters.

The opposition has been saying the Liberals are out of touch with the needs of everyday Ontarians. What does this budget say to voters about whether Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals are listening, particularly on pharmacare?

When you look at the spending on health care, the talk about improving hospitals and getting more people out of so-called 'hallway healthcare,' — Niagara Region gets a new hospital. There's something coming in Mississauga — you have to say they are listening. Local MPP's have been out and about taking the intel back to Queen's Park saying that health care is a big issue.

Duelling drug plans set stage for pharmacare election in Ontario

Now the question will be how well will the opposition be able to convince the public that the Liberals are repairing the problems that they themselves have created over 14 years. Interesting point on that, if you look at the budget you would think the Liberal government only began with Kathleen Wynne's election. Over time Ms. Wynne has collected some baggage and inherited baggage from former Premier Dalton McGuinty. What the Liberals have done with this budget is to try to airbrush out McGuinty. You can bet Horwath and Brown will want to airbrush McGuinty back into the equation for the next election. Kathleen Wynne served with McGuinty. They had been gently trying to run away from it. Now they have brought the hammer down. They're saying 'This is a brand new government, folks. This Dalton McGuinty guy, we've never heard of him.'

Before the budget was tabled, Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown accused finance minister Sousa of "cooking the books" to balance the budget. How did the Liberals manage to both increase spending and balance the books?

You've got a buoyant economy. The economy in Ontario is humming along at record speed that no one had forecast and ultimately may end up leading the country. It gives you lower unemployment rates. It gives you more corporate income. You also have more federal health care dollars coming in. You have money from the cap-and-trade. You have money coming in from the sale of Hydro One. Suddenly, a government that went through nine years of restraint has this whack of cash and they're going to spend it.

Everything a young Ontarian should know about Ontario Budget 2017

Mr. Sousa has said this budget is not a ploy to buy votes. He says it with a straight face. The reality is that's exactly what this is. Also, cleverly, they leaked a lot of the budget. The Premier has said there is some wiggle room. We can tweak this budget. Then look for another budget just before the June 28 election. This budget, when you pick it up and read it, you can smell the diesel fuel from the campaign buses on it. The next one will have an even stronger election aroma.

Last week you talked about how Kathleen Wynne's future as leader depends on how this budget is received by the public. Will it help her sway voters in the June 2018 election?

It's a critical document. Budgets are always important to leaders and that's particularly the case for Kathleen Wynne. It must move the yardsticks. They'll be polling like mad over the next little while to find out how Ontarians are reacting to this. There have been complimentary things said about the budget and others have said there are parts of this budget that are a good first step. That is code for 'I'm a hospital administrator. I could have used more money but I'm happy with the cash that's going to flow.'

You also have an issue where the government is building new schools and repairing others. At the same time they are closing schools that are the hub of the community. A lot of people are upset. It could be a sleeper issue in the next election campaign. Kathleen Wynne is extraordinary campaigner who has been underestimated all of her political life.

Why next week's Ontario budget might be Kathleen Wynne's last chance: Robert Fisher

People have said to me 'Kathleen Wynne could be replaced.' Actually, she could not be replaced. There is no one of the stature and capability in the caucus who could step up and replace her. They're going to take her into the election and she's determined to be there. I have heard from senior Conservatives who believe that anything is possible in the next election. The message from Conservatives to Patrick Brown is don't order the new drapes for the Premier's office just yet. Tim Hudak did that in 2014 and had to take that drapery back. Right now he's with the Ontario Real Estate Association. He's not sitting in the Premier's office.

2017/04/28 08:23 - PostMedia
thespec.com
Section: News
Published: 2017/04/28
Story ID: HBWO201704280019

Hamilton Spectator: Ontario budget highlights

Ontario's finance minister delivered the province's fiscal plan Thursday, the government's first balanced budget in a decade. Here are the highlights:

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PHARMACARE FOR YOUTH

More than 4,400 prescription drugs will be free for anyone under 25 starting next year under the province's new pharmacare program.

The program, dubbed OHIP+, is meant to provide universal drug coverage to children and youth regardless of family income.

It will cover all drugs currently available under the Ontario Drug Benefit program, with no co-payment or deductible.

The province says the new system will cost $465 million per fiscal year once it's up and running.

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HEALTH CARE 'BOOSTER SHOT'

Ontario has budgeted $11.5 billion in new health-care spending over the next three years, an amount that's $7 billion higher than the province had previously planned.

The so-called "booster shot" includes $1.3 billion to help cut wait times to see specialists, get key surgeries and access mental health services.

It also includes funds earmarked for hospital construction, such as new facilities in the Niagara and Windsor areas.

That spending will total $9 billion over a decade.

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GROWING DEBT

Despite reaching balance in its latest budget, Ontario's debt continues to grow - with projections putting it at $312 billion for 2017-2018.

The province's net debt is expected to rise to $336 billion in 2019-20.

Interest on debt is the fourth largest spending area, at $11.6 billion.

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CHILD CARE SPACES

Ontario is vowing to create 24,000 new licensed child care spots, 60 per cent of which would be government-subsidized.

That would come at a cost of $200 million.

The province says it has already created 56,000 licensed child care spaces in recent years.

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SCHOOL AND BEYOND

Ontario is vowing to build new schools in high-growth areas and help older facilities get a facelift.

The province is setting aside about $16 billion in the next decade for new construction as well as renovations and retrofits to make existing schools more energy-efficient.

Students are also getting a hand with work experience, with $190 million earmarked over three years to create 40,000 placements for them and for recent graduates.

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HELP FOR SENIORS

Getting around using public transit will be slightly cheaper for Ontario seniors, who will be able to get part of their transit expenses refunded under a new tax credit.

The program, which is slated to kick in on July 1, will cover 15 per cent of eligible transit costs, up to $130 per person annually.

It is expected to cost the province $10 million a year.

Money is also being set aside - $8 million over three years - for so-called elderly persons centres, which provide services such as meals on wheels and exercise classes.

The province's dementia strategy is also getting $100 million over three years to support residents with dementia and those who care for them.

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SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS RESIDENTS

Ontario's budget includes a number of measures meant to help the province's indigenous communities access education and justice, among other things.

The government is spending $200 million over three years to boost postsecondary education and training opportunities for indigenous people.

Meanwhile, $44.2 million will be spent in the next two years to expand or establish programs to make the justice system more culturally relevant, including the Gladue Program, which encourages courts to consider non-custodial sentences for indigenous offenders.

Another $2 million will be spent in that same time frame to develop anti-racism programs that will be designed and delivered by indigenous people.

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TAXES ON TOBACCO, HOTEL STAYS

The Liberals are increasing tobacco taxes and giving municipalities the power to levy a hotel tax.

Tobacco tax rates will rise by $10 per carton of cigarettes over the next three years, starting with a $2 bump that takes effect at midnight.

As for the hotel tax, the budget provides few details, but it will require amendments to the Municipal Act and the City of Toronto Act, which gives the city the authority to levy its own taxes, but that has so far excluded hotels.

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LAND TRANSFER TAX REVENUE INCREASE

Southern Ontario's booming housing market poured hundreds of millions more than expected into Ontario's coffers last fiscal year.

It helped generate $637 million more than projected in land transfer tax revenue.

The land transfer tax is expected to bring in $3.1 billion this fiscal year.

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ONLINE PROTECTION PILOT PROJECT

Ontario wants to help its financial institutions improve their cybersecurity with a new $4-million pilot project.

The project will pair financial institutions with companies working in the cybersecurity sector.

The province says that will also help create high-tech jobs.

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OPPOSITION PARTIES REACT

Ontario's opposition parties derided the Liberal government's budget.

Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown says the fiscal plan is nothing but a ploy to win over voters ahead of next year's provincial election.

Ontario's NDP Leader Andrea Horwath, meanwhile, says the budget does nothing to address the needs of cash-strapped families already struggling with hydro bills and housing costs.

CFTO: Toronto Mayor Responds to Ontario Budget	
Source: CFTO	Apr 28, 2017 12:00 PM

Anchor 1: Was Toronto short changed in the provincial budget? The mayor says yes. We're live over city hall where John Tory today accused **Kathleen Wynne** of turning her back on Toronto. Good afternoon, the mayor has harsh words today for the Ontario government saying the city has been let down, no new money in the provincial budget for the city’s most urgent needs.

Anchor 2: Those are transit and social housing. Natalie is live at city hall. John Tory did not mince words. He's angry with **Kathleen Wynne**.

Reporter: It's really become a pattern ever since the premier quashed the mayor's road tolls plan but John Tory was really hoping that the Wynne government would come to the table with a third of the money for the TCHC capital repair backlog plan. 326 units have had to be shuttered permanently because there's no money to fix them and the mayor says the province has helped create this crisis. As Toronto community housing apartments continue to crumble, more than a thousand of them are at risk of being permanently shuttered by the end of next year. And the mayor was fuming this morning that the provincial budget offers no new money to help.

Toronto Mayor John Tory: I think Toronto is being complete short changed and I made the point, I’m disappointed, I’m frustrated.

Reporter: John Tory had repeatedly asked the province to commit a third of the money required to tackle the repair backlog. $864 million over ten years. Today slamming the Wynne government for turning its back on Toronto.

Ontario **Premier Kathleen Wynne**: On housing, you know, we are very committed to both affordable and social housing. We're demonstrating that by putting $500 million from cap-and-trade revenue through the climate action plan to restore and renovate social housing. Toronto will get $130 million of that.

Mayor Tory: You can't play a highlights reel from last year and expect people to believe that you're going to be on the ice for the next game.

Reporter: Other councillors too were visibly upset.

Anna Bailao, Housing Chair: It would have been nice to have our provincial partners with us to ensure that we continue to improve the lives of these people.

Joe Cressey, TCHC Board Member: They have shown a complete disregard for the lives of our most vulnerable and those who need the most support.

Glenn de Baeremaeker, Toronto Councillor: We're left with nothing in our pockets. The city of Toronto cannot afford these costs all by themselves. It's physically and financially impossible.

Reporter: Councillors warning that if nothing changes, thousands more units will fall into a state of disrepair and will need to be closed for good. I asked the mayor whether he will actively campaign against the Liberals in next year's election because of all this. He said he won’t be quite that partisan but he will be making all of Toronto aware of what each party will do for this city. Reporting live at city hall, I’m Natalie Johnson. Over to you.

Ken: Thank you, Natalie. We're live at Queen’s Park where the budget was delivered. The premier and her Finance Minister were out this morning in front of the media boasting about their balanced budget and the premier did respond to Tory's criticism. We're going to go live to Paul Bliss in just a few minutes.

Transcript captured directly from source. Some typographical errors or omissions are to be expected.

CFTO: Ontario Budget Includes Pharmacare Plan	
Source: CFTO	Apr 28, 2017 12: 03 PM (2)

Anchor: Down at Queen’s Park, the Liberals are still proud of the centrepiece of this year's budget - free prescription drugs for everyone 24 years old and younger.

Ontario Premier **Kathleen Wynne**: With free prescription medication for children and youth, doctors will not have to worry about that anymore. They will know that when they prescribe medication for a child or for a young person, that child or young person will be able to get that medication.

Ontario Health Minister Eric Hoskins: It’s about breaking down barriers. It’s about our shared belief that everyone should have access to health care no matter where they stand.

Anchor: The coverage will roll out in the new year, with no upfront costs. It is the first of its kind in Canada, and will cost an estimated $465 million dollars per year. Drugs including birth control and asthma inhalers as well as some cancer treatment medicines, will be covered for free for everyone under the age of 25.

Transcript captured directly from source. Some typographical errors or omissions are to be expected.

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CFTO: Toronto City Councillors Respond to Ontario Budget	
Source: CFTO	Apr 28, 2017 12:06 PM (3)

Anchor: The provincial budget will also help certain areas in Toronto. But according to our mayor, there are a few key issues missing. Let's bring in our Cindy Pom who joins us live at City Hall, Cindy, what does council think of Wynne's budget?

Reporter: There is disappointment across the board, no matter their political stripe. In fact, Mayor Tory held a press conference this morning talking about his disappointment. We’ve poured through this thick, black budget book and nowhere does it say anything about new funding when it comes to transit for the city or public housing for the city. Mayor Tory warned that transit projects such as the Yonge relief line may not be able to go forward without provincial support.

Toronto Mayor John Tory: Premier Wynne and her government had the chance to stand up for Toronto on transit and housing. Instead, at least in the pages of this budget, they turned their backs.

Reporter: Usually City Hall is not too busy on a Friday but today we have seen a lot of people walking through, wanting to voice their disappointment. We talked with several counsellors and this is what they said.

Ana Bailao, Toronto City Councillor: In a time where units are crumbling, it does not make sense. We are not stopping, we are continuing, but it would have been nice to have our provincial partners with us to ensure that we can improve the lives of these people.

Joe Cressey, Toronto City Councillor: The province of Ontario kicked Toronto and our

Toronto Community Housing residents in the gut. They have shown a complete disregard for the lives of our most vulnerable and those who need the most support. Frankly I think every single Torontonian whether you are Liberal, or Democrat, or Conservative or Green should be appalled at what's happened in this province and should be demanding that the province do their fair share and we should repair our units, not close them.

Reporter: Some strong words there from city counsellors. The city, though, is getting some new revenue streams. The Ontario government okayed a hotel tax and Airbnb tax, as well as more childcare spaces. But still, consensus at City Hall is that that is not enough.

Transcript captured directly from source. Some typographical errors or omissions are to be expected.

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CFTO: Paul Bliss Comments on Ontario Budget	
Source: CFTO	Apr 28, 2017 12: 14 PM (12)

Anchor: More on our top story, Mayor Tory's bitter response to the budget. The premier has answered him. Paul Bliss joins us live in Queen’s Park. Wynne is disappointed that Tory is disappointed. Is that correct?

Reporter: Yeah, Ken, the province of Ontario has been throwing money at the city of Toronto, one could argue, but it's not enough. Toronto has so many expenses. It has to pay for social housing costs, the rising costs of operating the TTC, but John Tory is smart because while **Kathleen Wynne** is 13 months away from a provincial election, John Tory is 18 months away from a municipal election, and he has to somehow leverage more cash out of the provincial government in order to help Toronto improve its financial situation. So it's a smart political play by John Tory to come out hard against the premier of Ontario. Toronto is under extreme financial pressure but the premier says we're disappointed because you could point to the many billions of dollars that Queen’s Park is giving Toronto for transit projects, you just have to look at the construction all over the city. Plus Toronto got the power to tax vacant units to help with real estate prices and get more room for families. It's also given the mayor the power to tax hotels which is going to help the bottom line. But a more important thing for Premier **Kathleen Wynne** right now is this weekend to do some polling and assess how her budget, which is a good news budget, is going to affect her popularity. Having some fun with kids the day after her family-friendly budget. The premier and Liberal MPP s are hoping her popularity gets a bounce from the big announcement. We asked the premier if she thinks the goodies in the budget will improve her popularity.

Premier Wynne: Again, of course. Politicians, human beings love to be loved. But this budget and my political career is not about -- they're not about me being loved. They are about people having support that they need.

Reporter: But the budget is clearly targeted at young people, at women, and families. Here's proof. $465 million for children and youth, free prescription drugs. $200 million child care spaces and subsidies. $134 million for child welfare. $49 million for children's mental health. **Kathleen Wynne** and her team will likely be watching weekend polls closely to see if they get a bump up but she insists it's not about being loved, it's about getting the job done for Ontarians.

Premier Wynne: Whether people love me or not is beside the point. What I want is for them to love their lives and to really feel that Ontario is the best place to live and to raise a family.

Reporter: Some good news for the premier came in just a few minutes ago. DBRS, the bond rating agency, has given a modestly favourable review of Ontario's budget. It says that the economy is doing well and congratulates the province for balancing the books. It does note, though, that the debt level being $312 billion in debt could be problematic if there was a shock to the economy but otherwise gives the province credit for balancing the books. Live at Queen’s Park, I’m Paul Bliss, Ken, Michelle, back to you.

Michelle: Thank you, Paul.

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Ontario

Global: OCBCC Says Province Needs to Focus on Child Care Affordability	
Source: Global	Apr 28, 2017 12: 16 PM (6)

Farah: The big story out of yesterday's Liberal budget was the promise for pharmacare for young people. But what about day care? Did it get the attention it deserved? I’m joined now by Carolyn Ferns with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. Carolyn, as you pointed out, this is the number one priority in the throne speech, this is something that was talked about. Charles Sousa, the day before the budget, had that photo op, instead of getting new shoes as most finance ministers do, was at a day care and put kid shoes on little kids. This was something I know the premier has been focusing on that yet we still don't understand the commitment that this is getting.

Carolyn Ferns, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care: We were at Queen’s Park on Tuesday with families, and parents, and children, to push for child care and to make sure it was still on the agenda because it had been in the throne speech but we were getting a bit worried it was not getting much attention. The next day we saw the big press conference with an announcement on child care and the first details of this promise for 100,000 spaces over five years. What we would see this year, the budget committed to 24,000 spaces this year. So, more than one-fifth of that five-year commitment coming this year, which is really good. But what we’re still waiting to hear about is some of the other directions that the minister signalled in that pre-budget announcement. Things like an affordability strategy or a workforce strategy for early childhood educators. Those were things that were signalled in the pre-budget announcement but that we didn’t see yesterday.

Anchor: So you're pretty happy with the one-fifth, because it was going to be 100,000 child care spaces over five years. So this is what the government promised. Obviously, the big agenda item was pharmacare. Do you think the government should have put money into day care instead of paying for prescriptions for people under 25.

Ferns: I don't think it's an either or. Pharmacare is a great initiative for families. But child care is a big commitment that the government has made and we need to see them moving ahead on it. It is great to have this spaces there, and the government said that 60 per cent of the spaces will be subsidized for low income families. But the problem is that child care is unaffordable for most families. There was a study last year here in the city of Toronto saying that child care is unaffordable for 75 per cent of families. The minister signalled in the pre-budget announcement that they're going to look at an affordability strategy, but it can't come soon enough. We are anticipating that they will come out with the renewed a childcare framework in May. We can't wait to hear more about the meat in the policy directions that they're planning.

Anchor: You are pregnant, you're due in June, you are on the lists I'm sure. I remember I was pregnant I went to put my name on a list and somebody joked that I should of put my name on the list when I got married. Forget even if you have money, there's just no spaces. So it's not just affordable spaces, it's spaces in general.

Ferns: That's right. I am due in June and I am on more than a dozen childcare lists right now.

Anchor: And that costs money too.

Ferns: And what you hear back from centres is that the waiting list for an infant space is between one year and two years. If it's one year, okay I'm going to be on maternity leave for a year, and that's when I'm going to need a space. If the wait is for two years, then I'm going to be with those thousands of families around the province that are scrambling to find child care.

Anchor: So it really is a crisis right now. Carolyn, thank you so much for your insight on this and we'll see what the province has to say in the coming days or weeks to find out more of those numbers.

Transcript captured directly from source. Some typographical errors or omissions are to be expected.

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MCTV: MPP Vic Fedeli Raises Critiques Of Budget Cuts To Northern Development	
Source: MCTV	Apr 28, 2017 12:10 PM

Anchor: Nipissing MPP and Progressive Conservative finance critic Vic Fedeli isn't impressed with yesterday’s spring budget. He says it does little for the people of northern Ontario.

Vic Fedeli, PC MPP Nipissing: They've gutted the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines. They cut their budget by almost 10 per cent. They took more than $70 million out of that budget. And even more disturbing, the Ring of Fire, it was in the 2014 budget, repeated in the '15 budget, repeated in the 2016 budget and it's gone.

Tony: And Fedeli says anyone living north of Steeles Avenue in Toronto isn't benefiting from the Wynne government's spring budget.

Transcript captured directly from source. Some typographical errors or omissions are to be expected.

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MCTV: Ontario Budget Announcement	
Source: MCTV	Apr 28, 2017 12:07 PM

Anchor: Some big announcements were made yesterday in the Ontario budge. Highlights include a new pharmacare program for children and youth. The new plan would cover prescription medications to treat common conditions. CTV's Paul Bliss has a budget breakdown.

Reporter: The budget bombshell is free prescription drugs for everyone under the age of 25. It's a first of its kind in Canada. 4 million people under 25 will benefit starting January 1, 2018. 4,400 free drugs will be available. No co-payment, no deductible. At a cost of $465 million a year. Finance Minister Charles Sousa has tabled Ontario's first balanced budget in a decade and he is spending every extra penny.

Unidentified 1: Minister, your $311 billion in debt. You are paying $12 billion a year in interest. So why are you spending like there is no tomorrow?

Charles Sousa, Finance Minister: So debt is being managed and the first step to managing debt is coming to balance and we are balancing our books.

Reporter: There is a booster shot of 7 billion new dollars for health care to reduce wait times, increase the number of surgeries and expand hospital services. $350 million will help expand home care and assist those caring for people with dementia. And the government will publicly fund the new abortion pill. Toronto is getting the power to bring in a hotel tax and tax vacant units that's designed to free up places for people to live. And speaking of making it easier to find an affordable home the government transit plan is about to open a vast new market of cheaper homes that will be linked to Toronto by train. There will be week day GO train service into Niagara by 2021. The week day train will go to Grimsby, St. Catharine's and Niagara Falls by 2023. This makes it much easier for families to live there and work in the GTA. The hot housing market has given Queen's Park a huge infusion of cash. Land transfer taxes will bring in a stunning $3.1 billion this year. That's $637 million more than expected. Cigarette taxes to rise $2 a carton at midnight, $4 next year and $4 the year after that. But otherwise no new taxes on families.

Patrick Brown, Ontario Conservative Leader: Let's be clear. This is not a balanced budget. They are in fact running an operational deficit worth more than $5 billion.

Andrea Horwath, Ontario NDP Leader: With this budget the premier is choosing to look away. She is closing her eyes to what every day families need. What patients need. What young people need.

Minister Sousa: Mr. Speaker, together we will create a stronger and healthier Ontario.

Reporter: It's the second last budget before the next election and it's designed to appeal to those same Liberal voters who gave Kathleen Wynne a surprise majority victory in the last election. Paul Bliss, CTV news, Queen's Park.

Transcript captured directly from source. Some typographical errors or omissions are to be expected.

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CKCO: Premier Wynne Responds To Questions About The Politicisation Of The Budget	
Source: CKCO	Apr 28, 2017 12:15 PM

Anchor: The premier and her finance Minister were out this morning in front of the media boasting about their balanced budget. CTV's Paul Bliss reports.

Reporter: Having some fun with kids the day after her family-friendly budget. The premier and liberal MPPs are hoping her popularity gets a bounce from the big announcements. We ask the premier if she thinks if the goodies in the budget will improve her popularity.

Kathleen Wynne, Ontario Premier: Again, I -- of course politicians, human beings love to be loved but this budget and my political career are not about me being loved. They are about people having the supports that they need.

Anchor: But the budget is clearly targeted at young people, at women and families. Here's proof. $465 million for children and youth free prescription drugs. $200 million child care spaces and subsidies. $134 million for child welfare. $49 million for children's mental health. **Kathleen Wynne** and her team will likely be watching weekend polls closely to see if they get a bump but she insists it's not about being loved, it's about getting the job done for Ontarians.

Premier Wynne: Whether people love me or not is beside the point. What I want for them is to love their lives and to really feel that Ontario is the best place to live and to raise a family.

Anchor: Paul Bliss, CTV news.

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Ontario

CJOH: CHEO Chief Of Staff Responds To The Health Care Budget Allocation	
Source: CJOH	Apr 28, 2017 12:00 PM

Anchor: Good afternoon Michael is away. Today we begin with the sales job on the Ontario budget. They are desperate for a bounce, and they hope free prescription drugs for people under 25 will give them that bounce. The premier spoke just a few moments ago saying some families have no coverage at all and this fills a gap.

Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario: I'm very pleased to announce that starting in 2018, OHIP plus will make prescriptions medication for children and youth 24 and under free in the province of Ontario. Coverage will be automatic, and that means no up-front costs. No strings attached. For more than 4 million children and young people.

Anchor: The Ontario Liberals introduced a new pharmacare plan called OHIP plus starting January 1 next year. The province will offer universal coverage for 4,400 prescription drugs to anyone under 25 years of age. There was also money for hospitals in the budget yesterday. Here for the reaction on the budget and what it could mean for health care is the chief of staff of CHEO Dr. Lindsay Samson who joins us from CHEO. Dr. Samson we keep hearing from hospitals, we have for years that there's this gap. Does yesterday's move make it better or how would you characterize it?

Dr. Lindsay Samson, CHEO: Well, I think most importantly the announcement around OHIP plus is an exciting and encouraging commitment that will really ensure and mean no children and youth will go without needed medication to first get them healthy and keep them healthy. I think this is a really encouraging first step towards ensuring kids get the Health care they need.

Anchor: And what about the extension of new funding for hospitals. What impact will that have at CHEO?

Dr. Samson: Well, I think any announcement is very encouraging, and I think that it's still early. We're in the process of analyzing exactly what that means. That any new monies that are going to be used appropriately and wisely, are very helpful and wise, and will ensure we can deliver the services that kids need when they need it and within a reasonable amount of time to wait so. We very encouraged.

Anchor: For the public that, again, for years has been hearing the health care system needs more money, the health care system needs more money, I mean, there's almost a fatigue here. Is there ever an end, and perhaps not specifically to CHEO. Why is it that health care continues to be such a high demand for provincial money?

Dr. Samson: Well, I can say that, once again, in relation to the budget yesterday, it's early. We need to analyze exactly what's in it. Of course the health care system is requiring of appropriate resources that are used wisely and we're committed to doing that, with quality and safety of care being at the paramount. So I think this is a good way to come together and ensure that we have the resources that are needed, and we're committed to using them appropriately and well, and ensuring kids get the quality and safety of care that they need.

Transcript captured directly from source. Some typographical errors or omissions are to be expected.

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