

Queen's Park Today – Daily Report April 17, 2018

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Quotation of the day

“For those most wealthy — that includes Doug Ford, by the way. He’s going to be one of those people who will have to pay more.”

NDP leader Andrea Horwath says PC leader Doug Ford is one of the high-income Ontarians who will see an income tax hike, should the NDP win the June 7 election.

Today at Queen's Park

On the schedule

The House will reconvene Tuesday morning to continue second reading debate on **Bill 8**, Access to Consumer Credit Reports and Elevator Availability Act.

In the afternoon, the House will continue second reading debate on the government's budget legislation, **Bill 31**, Plan for Care and Opportunity Act.

Including today, there are 14 sessional days remaining until the writ drops on May 9, 2018. Ontario's 42nd general election is 52 days away.

Monday's debates and proceedings

The House convened on Monday morning for question period, after which MPPs voted to pass **Bill 6**, Correctional Services Transformation Act at second reading. The Liberals and the NDP supported the motion; the PCs opposed (Ayes 55: Nays 18). **Bill 8** was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

In the afternoon, the following bills were introduced and granted first reading:

- NDP MPP **Cindy Forster** re-introduced **Bill 48**, Protecting Vulnerable Persons in Supportive Living Accommodation Act, which would require anyone operating a supportive living facility to hold a government licence. It was first introduced and referred to the Standing Committee on General Government in May 2017.
- Liberal MPP **John Fraser** re-introduced **Bill 49**, WSIB Coverage for Workers in Residential Care Facilities and Group Homes Act. The bill, which had passed second reading in the previous session, would amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to classify any employer who operates a residential care facility or a group home as a Schedule 1 employer.
- NDP MPP **Wayne Gates** introduced **Bill 50**, Supporting Wine Jobs and Growth in the Niagara Region Act, which would exempt VQA Ontario wines from taxes when they are purchased from a winery's retail store.

MPPs then debated **Bill 8**, Access to Consumer Credit Reports and Elevator Availability Act, for the remainder of the day.

In the Park

Conservation Ontario will host an MPP information session and luncheon beginning Tuesday morning.

PCs call for investigation into alleged Liberal pre-election campaigning

PC campaign advisor and former cabinet minister **Frank Klees** held a news conference at PC Party headquarters on Monday morning where he accused the Ontario Liberal Party of "campaigning on the taxpayer dime." Klees said Premier **Kathleen Wynne** and the Liberals have held 25 "taxpayer funded announcements" over the past two weeks, many of which promoted policy and spending items designed for the campaign trail that are not actually included in the budget bill.

"In that budget bill that was tabled, there is nothing there about child care. In that budget there is nothing there about drugs and dental programs for seniors ... and so the announcements they are making are clearly campaigning. If it was about their budget then something would appear in the budget bill that actually follows through on that."

"They are taking advantage of taxpayer dollars to fund their campaign," Klees said. "Let's separate campaigning from government business."

The PCs estimate each press conference costs \$7,500, bringing the total cost over two weeks to \$185,000. Klees said if the figure is not correct, the PCs would be happy to see a line-by-line costing for how much the 25 government events actually cost.

In a letter to Elections Ontario head **Greg Essensa**, the PC Party's counsel requests an "investigation into this inappropriate use of taxpayers' dollars and what is clearly a breach of the Election Finances Act."

A spokesperson from the premier's office noted that the **Ernie Eves'** government (in which Klees served as a cabinet minister) made funding announcements up until the day the writ dropped in 2003.

Liberal campaign co-chair **Deb Matthews** told reporters every time the premier or her cabinet ministers made an announcement in recent weeks they were speaking on behalf of the government. "The premier is doing what happens after every budget, and that is talk about what's in the budget," Matthews said.

Liberals pledge to pass budget bill before writ drops

Despite time running out for the government to pass Finance Minister **Charles Sousa's** budget bill, the Liberals say they are confident **Bill 31**, Plan for Care and Opportunity Act, can be granted royal assent before the writ drops on May 9.

Asked Monday if the government intended to pass the budget in its 14 remaining sessional days, Attorney General and Government House leader **Yasir Naqvi** told *Queen's Park Today* that is the plan.

"We are working very hard to get the debate in the House complete, all the committee work that needs to be done and have it passed before the writ is issued," he said. "We are quite confident that we will get it passed, with the will of the House."

Sousa told reporters the details will be worked out by the Government House Leader's office, but that "it's important for us to pass the budget and run on the budget," rather than use its multi-billion promises as a campaign platform.

Topics of conversation

- PC leader **Doug Ford** was in Ottawa Monday to announce the second plank of his electoral campaign: creating a tax credit to allow anyone earning less than \$28,000 a year to avoid paying income taxes.
 - "We have a plan for the people of Ontario," Ford said in a [release](#). "We're going to clean up **Kathleen Wynne's** hydro mess and lower your taxes. And for folks making minimum wage, we're going a step further. Under a PC government, if you are making minimum wage, you are going to pay no income tax at all."
 - The income tax credit is valued at \$800 per year and will cost \$500 million to implement. It is not available to every person earning under \$28,000, only those who can prove they earn minimum wage via a pay stub or T4.
- On behalf of the Northern Ontario Large Urban Mayors group, North Bay Mayor **Al McDonald** is [calling](#) on all parties to agree to pay for land ambulance services in northern Ontario like the province did before Premier **Mike Harris** downloaded the costs to municipal governments in the 1990s.

- Polling from Brightpoint Strategy [shows Doug Ford](#) and the PCs enjoy a 15.3 percentage point lead in the polls over **Kathleen Wynne** and the Liberals. Just over 41 per cent of decided voters will cast a ballot for the PCs, Brightpoint found, compared to 26.3 per cent for the Liberal and 23 per cent for **Andrea Horwath** and the New Democrats. This suggests the post-budget popularity bump enjoyed by Premier Wynne was short-lived.
 - Artificial Intelligence market research and polling was used to conduct the survey of 119,000 Ontarians. The results can be considered accurate +/- 3.2 per cent.
- Metrolinx and the City of Toronto announced they will hold three public [hearings](#) on the Downtown Relief Line subway project, which is part of the larger Transit Project Assessment Process that is required before the line can be built.

Today's events

April 17 at 9 a.m. — Cornwall

PC leader **Doug Ford** will hold a breakfast reception with supporters at the Ramada Inn.

April 17 at 9 a.m. — Vaughan

Economic Development and Growth Minister **Steven Del Duca** will make an announcement at Dishon Limited.

April 17 at 9:30 a.m. — Scarborough

Premier **Kathleen Wynne** and Labour Minister **Kevin Flynn** will make an announcement at the United Association of Plumbers and Steamfitters, Local 46.

April 17 at 12 p.m. — Toronto

Premier **Kathleen Wynne** will hold a caucus meeting at Queen's Park.

April 17 at 1 p.m. — Brampton

Seniors Affairs Minister **Dipika Damerla** will make an announcement at Villa Polonia community care centre.

April 17 at 1 p.m. — Toronto

Environment and Climate Change Minister **Chris Ballard** will make an announcement at the St. Lawrence Market.

April 17 at 4:30 p.m. — Toronto

Premier **Kathleen Wynne** will meet with **Alvin Fiddler**, Grand Chief of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, to participate in a signing ceremony at Queen's Park.

April 17 at 6 p.m. — Kingston

PC leader **Doug Ford** will hold a rally with supporters at Minos Village Restaurant.

April 17 at 6 p.m. — Toronto

A coalition of environmental groups led by the Centre for Clean Air Policy will host its inaugural Oil and Gas Methane Leadership awards at the Enercare Centre to highlight the work of national and subnational governments in reducing methane emissions, a leading cause of climate change.

Appointments and nominations

Ministry of Municipal Affairs

- Former Toronto Mayor **David Crombie** has been [appointed](#) to chair a new Greenbelt Council that will advise the government on developing “complete communities,” protecting the environment and supporting agriculture in the Greater Toronto Area.

Funding announcements

Ministry of Economic Development and Growth

- Economic Development Minister **Steven Del Duca** was in Newmarket Monday to [announce](#) \$13 million in funding from the province’s cap-and-trade reserve will be used to buy 14 electric buses and four charging systems for use in Brampton and York Region. The buses are expected to be operational in 2019.

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

- Agriculture Minister **Jeff Leal** announced Monday that \$22.6 million has been [awarded](#) to food manufacturer Mondelez Canada to modernize and expand its operations. The money was allocated from the Jobs and Prosperity Fund and is expected to help retain more than 450 jobs in East York.

News briefs — Governmental

‘No choice’ but to tackle climate crisis: Gov. Brown

California Governor **Jerry Brown** was in Toronto Monday to tout the successes of the joint Ontario-California-Quebec carbon market, saying there is “no choice” but to fight climate change happening across North America.

“I’m here in Ontario because Premier **[Kathleen] Wynne** shares California’s commitment to fighting carbon pollution and creating jobs,” Brown said in a [statement](#). Whether it’s wildfires ravaging northern California or floods in Ontario, Brown said “We have no choice but to press forward, no matter the obstacles or opposition.” That opposition has come from Ontario PC leader **Doug Ford**. “I’ll tell you what my new policy is for cap and trade,” Ford said in late February while campaigning for the Tory leadership: “We’re going to cap taxes and trade Kathleen Wynne.”

Ford has vowed from day one of his leadership campaign to scrap the Liberal's cap-and-trade plan and the billions in dedicated revenue it has generated. Despite Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau**'s plan to legislate a carbon price on all provinces who refuse to implement one of their own, the Tory leader has [vowed](#) to challenge Trudeau's dictum all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada.

There are many opportunities for the private sector to take advantage of a low-carbon future, the premier said in a statement, but government has to lead the way. "You can't build a clean and modern economy without a price on pollution."

Ontario has generated \$2.4 billion from polluters so far through carbon credit auctions. To date, proceeds have gone to fund home and institutional energy retrofits and expand public transit and cycling infrastructure.

The next carbon offset auction will be held on May 15, 2018.

News briefs — Non-governmental

NDP campaign platform release: "Change for the better"

NDP leader **Andrea Horwath** released "Change For the Better," the Ontario NDP's spring election platform, on Monday afternoon. The platform promises \$5.3 billion in new spending in 2018-19, increasing to \$15.8 billion in 2022-23. This will result in five years of deficits, ranging between \$2 billion and \$5 billion annually. This is lower than the \$6.7 billion deficit proposed by the Liberals in the 2018 budget.

The NDP will campaign on bringing corporate tax rates back up to 13 per cent from their current rate of 11.5 per cent. Horwath will also increase income taxes on high-income earners. Ontarians earning more than \$220,000 will get hit with a one per cent tax increase and those earning more than \$300,000 will see their income tax rate increase by two per cent.

"We are not ashamed of saying that those highest income earners amongst us need to pay a little bit more. That's what makes it a responsible plan," Horwath told reporters at Toronto Western Hospital following the launch. "We are going to invest in the services that people need, and we are going to ask those wealthiest amongst us to help us get that job done. It's what should have been happening all along and it's what New Democrats are not afraid to put into place."

The 97-page platform is interspersed with anecdotes from Ontarians who received poor treatment from Ontario's health care system, which the NDP propose to help by ramping up funding for medicine, hospitals and community care.

The NDP's pharmacare plan will cost \$504 million by 2022-23 and will cover an "essential medicines list" of approximately 100 frequently used drugs for everyone in Ontario. Public dental care will cost an additional \$1.015 billion by 2022-23.

Alongside their announcement, the NDP included a letter from former parliamentary budget officer **Kevin Page** of the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy signing off on the platform's costing.

"People can get so much more from a government that puts the people of our province, everyday families, at the heart of every decision," Horwath said. "That's the difference between our plan and the other plans."

Childcare

The platform contains a \$12-per-day childcare promise. Families with a household income of under \$40,000 will receive free not-for-profit, licensed childcare.

For households earning more than \$40,000, daycare fees will be adjusted according to earnings, but will average at \$12-per-day. The party said fees will be means-tested but did not provide a detailed costing plan for how much people will pay according to their income. The NDP also promised to add 202,000 new childcare spaces.

Hospitals

The platform includes an immediate 5.3 per cent increase to hospital operational funding. The \$916 million annual bump will ensure all hospitals receive a base funding increase that is above inflation. The NDP will also add 2,000 new hospital beds at a cost of \$312 million in the first year.

The NDP pledged to end the underreporting of surgery wait times, increase funding for community health centres, and create 70 new public dental clinics and seven new mobile dental buses for rural and remote regions. The campaign also promises to hire 360 midwives and to guarantee no cuts are made to women's health centres.

Long-term care

The NDP will institute a requirement that all seniors in long-term care homes receive at least four hours of care per day, for an estimated cost of \$257 million per year. It will also create 40,000 new long-term care beds and update the long-term care residents' "Bill of Rights" to allow elderly couples to stay together.

Hydro rates

The NDP pledges to cut hydro bills by 30 per cent by ending mandatory time-of-use pricing and by getting "private profits" off of hydro bills. The party will buy back Hydro One using dividends from the remaining public shares. The party also said it would scrap the government's Fair Hydro Plan.

Housing speculation tax

Following in the footsteps of British Columbia's NDP government, the Ontario NDP proposes to add a new speculation tax on out-of-province residents who own investment properties in the GTHA. The tax will start at \$5 on every \$1000 of a home's assessed value and will increase to \$20 in 2021. There will also be a new three per cent tax added to luxury cars that cost more than \$90,000, bringing in \$12 million per year.

Bits and bobs

- The NDP would ban “pink taxes,” a reference to a trend of retailers and manufacturers charging more for products targeted to women.
- The NDP said they will strike a democratic reform commission to “inspire voter confidence” and interest in the democratic process. The party would also eliminate costs for filing Freedom of Information requests.
- The NDP pledged to build 65,000 new affordable homes over 10 years, while overhauling inclusionary zoning regulations and spending \$3 million to revive the province’s co-op housing sector.

Responses

Ontario Liberal Party

The Liberals said the NDP platform risks increasing hydro rates and jeopardizing government investments in seniors care and transit infrastructure. But given similarities between the government and New Democrats on issues of pharmacare, dental access and child care, the Liberals also welcomed many planks in the NDP platform: “Either [because we are] already implementing them or because they reinforce our view that this election provides a stark choice between care and Conservative cuts.”

The biggest disagreement the government has with Horwath’s platform is her proposal to spend \$6.5 billion to buy back shares of Hydro One. This action “won’t do anything to lower electricity rates,” the party said. “Ontario Liberals had hoped the NDP would join us in campaigning against Doug Ford and on the side of care, instead of cuts.”

The Liberals also criticized the platform for failing to commit to high-speed rail and for reducing the number of apprentices that can be trained in the province.

Green Party of Ontario

Green Party of Ontario leader **Mike Schreiner** is [accusing](#) the NDP of abandoning any commitment to improve the province’s environment or tackle climate change in their latest campaign platform.

“The NDP are not shy about emptying the vault for important social issues, but the party is content to starve environmental programs,” the Greens said in a statement, noting the NDP platform unveiled today says nothing about reducing greenhouse gases, increasing renewable energy or boosting the cleantech sector.

The PC Party did not immediately release a response to the NDP platform.

Question Period

PC lead-off

Energy prices

- PC MPP **Todd Smith** asked Energy Minister **Glenn Thibeault** about consulting discrepancies from Deloitte, KPMG and Ernst and Young on the Fair Hydro Plan.
 - Smith told the House that Auditor General **Bonnie Lysyk** maintains Deloitte, KPMG and Ernst and Young provided no formal opinion on the Fair Hydro Plan, contrary to what the government has said.

(Speaker **Dave Levac** skipped the PC's second lead-off question because of sustained heckling in the House.)

NDP lead-off

Hospital overcrowding

- NDP MPP **France G  linas** asked Education Minister **Indira Naidoo-Harris**, on behalf of Health and Long-Term Care Minister **Helena Jaczek**, if she believes hospital overcrowding should be acceptable in the first world.
 - Naidoo-Harris used the opportunity to detail how the Liberals are boosting hospital budgets and funding capital investments at SickKids and other hospitals across Ontario.

Crisis in Ontario hospital

- G  linas asked Attorney General **Yasir Naqvi** who the government believes is responsible for the crisis in Ontario hospitals.
 - G  linas said Ontarians know that PC leader **Doug Ford** will cut and privatize health care, but asked whether the government is sorry for the damage it has overseen in Ontario's hospitals.
 - Naqvi asked the New Democrats to support the government's budget given that it includes \$822 million for hospital budgets.

Other questions:

- PC MPP **Monte McNaughton** asked Finance Minister **Charles Sousa** and Environment Minister **Chris Ballard** how much the cap-and-trade plan has increased the price of gasoline and why the government has allowed this to happen.
- NDP MPP **Wayne Gates** and PC MPP **Raymond Cho** asked Sousa about the Ministry of Finance's failure to meet the 15 per cent reduction in auto insurance rates it promised in 2013.
- NDP MPP **Peggy Sattler** asked Naidoo-Harris about rules set out to transfer patients from critical care and the ER to hallways, and why hallway treatment has become normalized in Ontario hospitals.
- PC MPP **Todd Smith** asked Thibeault if he believes the \$6.2 million salary for Hydro One CEO **Mayo Schmidt** is "acceptable".

- PC MPP **Steve Clark** asked Premier **Kathleen Wynne** how much money the government has spent “campaigning on the taxpayers’ dime” in the past two weeks.
- NDP MPP **Jennifer French** asked Labour Minister **Kevin Flynn** about exemptions made to limit bereavement leave for auto workers.