

Queen's Park Today – Daily Report December 12, 2017

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Quotation of the day

“It's no coincidence that this baseless suit comes the same day the PCs called for an OPP investigation into ineligible expenses claimed by insider energy executives.”

Nick Bergamini, a spokesperson for Patrick Brown, responds to Premier Wynne officially suing the PC leader for libel.

Today at Queen's Park

On the schedule

The House will convene at 9 a.m. to continue third reading debate on **Bill 139**, Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act. This will be the fifth day of debate on this stage of a bill the government has said it wants passed by the end of this week. Expect a vote to be held after question period on either Tuesday or Wednesday.

MPPs will vote on the third reading stage of **Bill 174**, the government's cannabis bill, and **Bill 160**, the healthcare omnibus bill that requires pharmaceutical companies to disclose any payments made to doctors, after question period.

As often happens at the end of a legislative session, the house leaders have coordinated to expedite the passage of a cross-section of popular bills at third reading. In the afternoon, the House will debate six private members' bills. Most have passed second reading and are stuck in committee stage:

- Liberal MPP **John Fraser's Bill 60**, Lebanese Heritage Month;
- **Bill 71**, Lung Health Act, which is co-sponsored by Liberal MPP **Ted McMeekin**, NDP MPP **France G  linas** and PC MPP **Jeff Yurek**;
- NDP MPP **Cheri DiNovo's Bill 74**, Trans Day of Remembrance Act;

- **Bill 82**, Lawren Harris Day Act, which is co-sponsored by Liberal MPP **Han Dong** and PC MPP **Bill Walker**;
- Liberal MPP **Lou Rinaldi's Bill 107**, Ontario Craft Beer Week Act; and
- PC MPP **Raymond Cho's Bill 123**, Korean Heritage Month Act.

Debates and proceedings

NDP leader **Andrea Horwath** introduced **Bill 188**, Protecting Hydro Consumers Act (Prepayment Meters). Horwath's bill would prohibit electricity distributors from installing pre-paid meters anywhere in Ontario. The legislation is in response to Hydro One's rate application for 2018 to 2022, which includes a proposal to install pre-paid hydro meters in homes and small business. Energy Minister **Glenn Thibeault** has said repeatedly during question period that, if the OEB accepts the proposal, pre-paid meters would be an opt-in program.

Bill 174, Cannabis, Smoke-Free Ontario and Road Safety Statute Law Amendment Act, was debated in the afternoon. After two hours, a vote on the third reading stage was called and deferred until Tuesday morning.

Bill 160, Strengthening Quality and Accountability for Patients Act, was also debated at third reading with a final vote deferred until Tuesday.

In the park

The Ontario Environment Industry Association is scheduled to hold a lobby day at Queen's Park, including an afternoon reception for MPPs.

Paramedics represented by CUPE will hold a rally on the Queen's Park lawn to protest provisions in **Bill 160**, Strengthening Quality and Accountability for Patients Act, that would allow firefighters to provide emergency medical care. The paramedics argue firefighters will be tasked with providing medical care without proper oversight or management.

Wynne officially files defamation suit against Brown

Premier **Kathleen Wynne's** lawyer filed a statement of claim in Toronto court on Monday "to preserve the ability to continue with a defamation case against **Patrick Brown**." A spokesperson for Wynne said the premier is hopeful the issue, which was spurred by Brown saying Wynne was "standing trial" during the Sudbury by-election trial when she was actually appearing as a witness, can be resolved by an apology. Brown has thus far refused to apologize.

A spokesperson for Brown said that as of 5:30 p.m. Brown had not been served with a statement of claim. Angry that news about the statement of claim was issued to the media before the defendant, Brown's lawyer wrote to Wynne's lawyer saying all future communications should be directed to him and requesting they agree on an expedited timeline for the proceedings.

The PC leader's office said if Wynne is serious about the lawsuit, she should bring it to a public hearing as soon as possible, instead of repeatedly using it as a mechanism to distract from her government's record.

Topics of conversation

- At the federal, provincial and territorial finance ministers' meeting in Ottawa on Monday, the federal government agreed to a 75/25 revenue split on cannabis sale tax revenues. The provinces will receive 75 per cent of cannabis-specific tax revenue, and the federal government will receive 25 per cent. The federal government also agreed to a \$100-million cap on its share of the tax revenue.
- During members' statements, NDP MPP **Percy Hatfield** recited a [Christmas poem](#) lamenting the prevalence of heckling during question period.
- *Canadaland* [interviewed](#) **Jeff Ballingall**, founder of the Facebook page Ontario Proud, about his business model and the motivation behind the anti-Wynne platform.
- The law firms Koskie Minsky LLP and Watkins Law P.C. are bringing forward a \$600 million [class action lawsuit](#) against the province on behalf of survivors of Ontario Training Schools, which operated between the 1930s and 1984. It is expected there are 10,000 survivors of these training schools, which used corporal punishment on students deemed unmanageable by the rest of the education system.

Today's events



December 12 at 7:30 a.m. — Toronto

Premier **Kathleen Wynne** and Quebec Premier **Philippe Couillard** will meet at Queen's Park.



December 12 at 8:30 a.m. — Aurora

Transportation Minister **Steve Del Duca**, Environment Minister **Chris Ballard**, York Region CEO **Wayne Emmerson** and Metrolinx president and CEO **Phil Verster** will make an announcement at the Aurora GO Station.



December 12 at 9 a.m. — Toronto

Premier **Kathleen Wynne** and Quebec Premier **Philippe Couillard** will participate in a talk hosted by the Mowat Centre as part of its Tomorrow 2.0 conference at the Design Exchange.



December 12 at 9:15 a.m. — Toronto

NDP MPP **Monique Taylor** will hold a press conference about a motion she is tabling to address "severe waitlists for children and youth needing mental health services."

**December 12 at 10 a.m. — Toronto**

Tourism, Culture and Sport Minister **Eleanor McMahon** will make an announcement at the ROM.

**December 12 at 10 a.m. — Toronto**

Liberal MPP **Yvan Baker** will hold a press conference at Queen's Park to announce a private members' bill that "would make the consumer experience more transparent."

**December 12 at 10 a.m. — Toronto**

Lyft, a ride-sharing platform similar to Uber, will officially launch in Toronto at Airship 37, 37 Parliament Street.

**December 12 at 12 p.m. — Toronto**

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

**December 12 at 3:30 p.m. — Toronto**

Premier **Kathleen Wynne** and Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Minister **Jeff Leal** will deliver remarks at the Agri-Food Summit at the ROM.

Funding announcements

- Premier **Kathleen Wynne** and Early Years and Child Care Minister **Indira Naidoo-Harris** announced \$1 million in funding to create 39 new child care spaces at Santa Maria Catholic School in Toronto.
 - According to the announcement, 493 new child care rooms have been built within schools, creating over 8,400 new spaces, thanks to \$230 million invested in 2017-18.
 - This is part of the province's \$1.6 billion in promised funding to create 45,000 new childcare spaces within five years.
- The **Ministry of Poverty Reduction** announced \$200,000 in funding for the Kinna-aweya Legal Clinic in Thunder Bay, which helps Indigenous people access the documentation they require to obtain housing, and \$800,000 for Nishnawbe Aski Nation for the Good Things Growing Among People program, which helps bring healthy food to Indigenous communities.

News briefs — Non-governmental

Financial Accountability Officer

Temporary Financial Accountability Officer **J. David Wake** released his office's 2017 "Fall Economic and Fiscal Outlook" on Monday morning at Queen's Park.

The [five-year outlook](#) uses both the government's budgetary numbers and the auditor general's preferred accounting framework to come up with two different fiscal futures. The FAO's official projections side with the AG because "the auditor general is the authority on the appropriate interpretation of the accounting for the provincial accounting systems," said FAO chief economist **David West**.

During a news conference the FAO warned that because of these ongoing disputes, "it is becoming more difficult for legislators and the public to assess the government's fiscal projections."

Using the government's accounting, the FAO projects the province will have a small budget surplus in 2017-18, but it will deteriorate to a deficit of \$3.7 billion by 2021-22. Using the AG's recommended accounting, the province will have a \$4 billion deficit next year, jumping to a deficit of \$9.8 billion by 2021-22.

These changes reflect the accounting of jointly-sponsored pension plan assets and of the Fair Hydro Plan. By 2021-22, the projected \$9.8 billion deficit will include \$3.2 billion in Fair Hydro Plan spending and roughly \$6 billion in accounting adjustments.

These discrepancies can also be seen in the FAO's net debt-to-GDP outlook, which shows the net debt-to-GDP rising from 39.6 in 2017-18 to 41.4 per cent by 2021-22. Based on the government's accounting, the net debt-to-GDP will only be 37.7 per cent in 2017-18 and will rise slightly to 38.7 per cent by 2021-22. The FAO projects the province's debt will increase by more than \$75 billion over the next four years, hitting \$400 billion.

The FAO forecasts annual revenue growth of 3.5 per cent over the forecasted period, but warns the loss of one-time-limited revenues is on the horizon, including revenues from asset sales, higher-than-normal federal infrastructure transfers, the end of the debt retirement charge and federal equalization payments, which the FAO estimates will end in 2019-20.

Overall, the FAO is bullish on Ontario's economy, saying it "exceeded expectations in 2017" with projected GDP growth of 2.8 per cent.

Responses

In an emailed statement, Finance Minister **Charles Sousa** thanked the FAO for his report, adding that he is glad "the FAO confirms that Ontario's economy is growing and he expects this growth to continue."

Asked by reporters whether, if elected, a PC government would decide to adopt the AG's accounting and use the deficit as an excuse to make spending cuts, PC MPP **Todd Smith** said, "what we have to do right now is compare the numbers the government is providing us with and work from that ... this is what we are doing right now. We are taking the numbers the government is giving us right now and using them in our platform."

Ontario PC Party

PC MPP **Todd Smith** wrote an open letter to OPP Commissioner **Vince Hawkes** calling for an investigation into the \$260 million in "ineligible expenses" companies billed the IESO. Smith called billings for scuba gear, car washes and coveralls "Gas Plants 2.0."

Smith also said the "revelation" that Ontario Power Generation is one of the companies accused of billing ratepayers for inappropriate expenses has "has drawn the Liberal government closer to the heart of the scandal."

Smith said his party is calling for an OPP investigation because the Liberal members of the justice committee voted down the PC's call for a committee investigation and there is no other recourse the party can take within the parliamentary system.

"The abuses are so egregious that a second look by law enforcement is only prudent," Smith wrote in the letter to Hawkes, calling it "a broad and systemic abuse of the energy system."

***The auditor general's report said there was \$260 million in overbillings. The government is using an updated number from the IESO of \$200 million in its defence against the PC's attacks, saying there is only \$32 million that needs to be recouped.

The Ontario PC Party will hold nomination meetings in the ridings of Niagara Falls and Spadina—Fort York on Tuesday evening.

Question period

PC lead-off

Ineligible billings

- PC MPP **Todd Smith** asked whether the government ignored five warnings from the Ontario Energy Board about the nine companies that made "ineligible billings" to the IESO because Ontario Power Generation — which, according to Smith, is one of the nine companies — was overbilling customers and thus, generating more money for the provincial coffers.
 - Smith said the government benefited from Ontario Power Generation's overbilling to the tune of 10s of millions of dollars.
- Energy Minister **Glenn Thibeault** said Ontario Power Generation repaid the overbilling costs to the IESO in full in 2015.

- Thibeault said \$168 million of the \$200 million in ineligible billing charges have been recovered by the IESO — \$32 million are still in discussion.
 - Thibeault told reporters he and the IESO both take this seriously: “Any inaccurate submissions into the system need to be dealt with accordingly.”
- Thibeault said this happened under “an older program that has been adjusted so this won’t happen again.” He said more updates are on the way in terms of market renewal, which will result in a more competitive marketplace.

Minimum wage increases

- PC MPP **John Yakabuski** called on Liberal MPP **Ann Hoggarth** to apologize for [suggesting](#) that small businesses struggling to meet labour costs under the incoming minimum wage should shut their doors.
- Premier **Kathleen Wynne** fielded the question by discussing the successes of her China-Vietnam trade mission.
 - Wynne said she is 100 per cent sure Hoggarth supports small businesses in her community and stressed the importance of people earning a living wage so they can shop at small businesses.

FAO report

- PC MPP **Vic Fedeli** asked what the government plans to do to address the Financial Accountability Officer’s determination that it must either employ additional measures to raise revenues or lower spending if it wants to achieve a balanced budget.
 - Fedeli said the PC’s People’s Guarantee will save two cents on every dollar that the provincial government spends.
- Wynne said the FAO confirmed the province’s economy is growing and that there will be a small surplus in 2017-18. She said the PC’s will cut \$12 billion out of health care, education and other services and she does not support that.

Health care funding

- The PCS also asked about waiting lists for people with mental health issues who end up in emergency rooms. PC MPP **Sylvia Jones** said according to a [new study](#) in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, most people who end up in the hospital after a suicide attempt do not receive treatment from a psychiatrist for six months.
- The Liberals said the PC Party’s plan to provide \$1.9 billion in funding for mental health is not enough, noting her government spent \$10 billion on the mental health system in a decade.
- The PCs said they are going to provide \$1.9 billion *additional* funding.
 - Yakabuski heckled that the Liberals must stop misrepresenting his party’s platform and was reprimanded by the speaker.

Generic drug pricing

- PC MPP **Jeff Yurek** asked about the AG's findings that the government is overpaying for generic drugs by up to 85 per cent compared to hospitals. He also said the Ministry of Health spent \$1 million in 2015-16 on drugs for people who were already deceased.
- Deputy Premier **Deb Matthews** said Yurek is on the record opposing the Liberal government's move to cut prices of generic drugs in half.
 - Matthews said Yurek "ran for the Progressive Conservative Party because he opposed it that much."

NDP lead-off

Pre-pay hydro meters

- NDP leader **Andrea Horwath** called on the premier to support her ban on pre-paid "Margaret Thatcher-style" hydro meters in Ontario.
 - Horwath said she wants to ban the government from forcing Ontarians to pre-pay the meter before they can turn the lights on.
- Thibeault fielded the question, repeating his talking points about the pre-pay meter proposal still being under review by the Ontario Energy Board. He said winter disconnections will still be banned.
 - "Even if this technology is ever approved by the Ontario Energy Board, customers will have to opt-in."

Hospital overcrowding

- NDP MPP **France G  linas** asked about a patient who was diagnosed with pneumonia at Brampton Civic Hospital last week, but could not be admitted because the hospital was too crowded.
 - According to G  linas, the patient was forced to move to an Etobicoke hospital where she received care in a hallway for two days, rather than in isolation.
- The government responded by discussing its promise to make 2,000 additional hospital beds available before the end of the year.

College strike

- Calling 2017 "the year students gave up on the dream of a college education," NDP MPP **Peggy Sattler** asked when the government will release the number of students that have applied for tuition refunds after the five-week strike.
 - Sattler said, according to media reports, there have been 1,232 withdrawals at St. Clair College, nearly 2,000 from Fanshawe and almost 1,200 from the five northern Ontario colleges.
- Advanced Education Minister **Deb Matthews** would not give any indication of the number of students that have dropped out. (There is speculation the number could be as high as 25,000).

- Matthews told the reporters the government will get the numbers out “as soon as we possibly can” but must ensure all colleges are using the same formula to quantify the number of students who sought tuition refunds.

Thunder Bay jail

- NDP leader **Andrea Horwath** said she visited the Thunder Bay jail last week and found “the conditions that led to the [2015] riot, the [2015] hostage taking, and the years-long isolation of **Adam Capay** still exist.”
 - Horwath asked how much longer correctional officers, staff and inmates have to wait before shovels are in the ground at the replacement facility the government promised.
- Community Safety and Correction Services Minister **Marie-France Lalonde** said her government “made the announcement for new infrastructure and we will be moving forward in that transformation.”