

# FW: QP Briefing: March 14, 2017

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Story #2 as per our conversation

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## QP Briefing

March 14, 2017

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## Articles

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### 1). Sousa: Ontario's health deal with the feds includes social housing, 'to some extent'

By: Jessica Smith Cross

Ontario's health deal with the federal government includes some kind of "sweetener" in the form of social housing — but exactly what that is, the minister of finance isn't saying.

In negotiating with the federal government, Finance Minister Charles Sousa and Health Minister Eric Hoskins had drawn a hard line for months: the government's "final" offer made in December just wasn't enough to help Ontario meet the health needs of its growing and aging population.

And then on Friday, the provincial government announced it had a deal. The contents of the deal disclosed by a press release had been on offer for months. One-by-one, other provinces had agreed to a similar formula: accept the targeted funding for home care and mental health the federal government had offered in December, on top of the Canada Health Transfer that had been legislated under the Stephen Harper government.

Asked Friday what had changed to prompt Ontario to accept a deal now, Sousa mentioned that provinces also got "sweeteners" with their bilateral deals for their needs, such as British Columbia's extra \$10 million to fight its opioid crisis.

In Ontario's case, it's a "recognition that social housing is important," he said, at the time. "So we'll be able to work with them on that score."

On Monday, he elaborated. Sousa met with Toronto Mayor John Tory and then held a joint press conference. Sousa said the two had discussed the issue of social housing.

"I've just recently signed and agreed to a health accord with the federal government, which included, to some extent, adding a little bit more for social housing and affordable housing so we can meet those growing demands," he added.

The minister's office wouldn't give any details beyond Sousa's public comments about what, exactly, the federal government is offering, except that discussions are continuing and, "Stay tuned!"

NDP health critic France Gélinas said she'd have to see a commitment on social housing to believe it — but said it could improve the health of Ontarians, as poverty is the No. 1 social determinant of health.

"If you want to have an impact on the health of people you lift them out of poverty, and you will have the biggest impact," she said. "Is housing a part of this? Yes, absolutely. Housing is important to a person's health but it doesn't usually get negotiated in the health-care budget."

Overall, however, Gélinas was critical of the outcome of the talks. She said the provinces and territories had missed an opportunity to establish a deal on a pharmacare program, and said the federal Liberal government's final offer falls short of Ontario's needs.

PC Health Critic Jeff Yurek was unavailable for an interview.

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## 2). Government looking at hospital funding ahead of 2017 budget: Wynne

By: Jessica Smith Cross

Premier Kathleen Wynne said Tuesday her government knows hospitals need more money and is particularly "cognizant" of that in this prebudget time.

In recent days, both opposition parties have been highlighting the fact that the Liberals' recently released hydro relief plan doesn't give hospitals the 25 per cent off their bills it promises to other ratepayers. Instead, Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault has said hospitals will only see savings in the range of 2 to 4 per cent on their bills.

Wynne took questions about that issue in Barrie Tuesday morning. In response, she said there's "more to be done," and acknowledged there are "issues around" hospitals' global budgets.

"We know that there's more that they need in terms of being able to provide the service that people need," she said.

**"We're going to be looking at that as we go into the budget," she added.**

**The province had frozen base hospital funding for four years, before raising it by \$345 million — or 1 per cent — in the 2016 budget, and boosting it by another \$140 million in November.**

**Wynne spoke of the government's plans to shift health care outside of hospitals, to home and community care.**

**"We know that there have been, you know, really significant transformations that have happened in the health care system. There is more community service that is being provided, people want more care in their homes," she said. "Because it's not just about home care, it's also about hospital care. We are very cognizant of that as we go into the budget."**

**Meanwhile, her government has been the target of news stories and opposition press releases about already strapped hospital budgets being further stretched by rising hydro costs.**

**"Yesterday, Barrie's Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre (RVH) revealed it was forced to find \$4.4 million in savings to balance their 2017-18 budget," the Progressive Conservatives announced in a press release about the hospital's "skyrocketing hydro costs."**

**On Monday, a similar release came from the NDP in Sault Ste. Marie — where the parties will soon be squaring off in a byelection. "Over four years, from 2011 to 2015, the hospital's total annual electricity consumption has stayed the same, yet the total billed amount for hydro has risen to \$2.7 million from \$1.8 million - an increase of 45 per cent," the NDP said, in its press release about the Sault Area Hospital.**

**"The pressure from skyrocketing hydro bills and frozen hospital budgets has already led to frontline workers being laid off, and longer wait times for diagnostic tests like MRIs or CT scans," said NDP Leader Andrea Horwath, in the release.**

**Brandy Sharp Young, a spokesperson for the Sault Area Hospital (SAH), confirmed that, over the past five years, its electricity costs to have risen by about \$900,000, but said the hospital "has not made decisions directly tied to the increase in electricity rates," nor are there any layoffs planned.**

**"SAH is challenged annually to find efficiency improvements in our operations due to many factors such as the impacts of health system funding reform, zero to minimal increases in hospital funding over the last several years, compensation increases and increasing electrical rates," Sharp Young said.**

**Meanwhile, the North Bay Regional Health Centre is also planning layoffs of 30 to 40 positions, according to a report in the Nugget newspaper, which primarily blamed arbitrated increases to staff salaries, benefits and insurance — totalling \$3.7 million — but also increased hydro costs of \$200,000.**

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### 3). A year later, Queen's Park e-petition platform still a work in progress

By: Geoff Zochodne

Members of provincial parliament aren't rushing to update the proud tradition of paper petitions to the legislature.

In fact, more than a year after Queen's Park endorsed the idea of electronic petitions, MPPs are still sorting out the details.

The legislative assembly committee referred the entire e-petition file to a subcommittee on March 8, giving MPPs a chance to alert their party house leaders that a change to the standing orders may be in the offing.

"It's not like I don't want to do it," said Liberal MPP Soo Wong. "Trust me, I want to do it, like, yesterday. But given the opening of the standing orders, we have to have this conversation with the House leaders."

Legislative staff have recommended that the best way for Queen's Park to launch an e-petition platform is to piggyback on one the House of Commons launched in 2015.

However, for that process to start, the legislative assembly committee must make a decision, which it hasn't done yet. When it does, funding for the endeavour still has to be approved by the legislature's board of internal economy, and then the house would have to approve a change to its standing orders to allow e-petitions. Once that's happened, the legislative committee was told, it could take approximately six to nine months for Queen's Park to have its platform up and running.

Assembly clerk Todd Decker told committee members on March 1 that there would be a one-time cost of \$222,000 to pay House of Commons staff to develop an e-petition system tailor-made for Queen's Park. Approximately \$128,000 would be required annually for support, maintenance and hosting the system.

"If that's approved [by the board of internal economy], then we could start working with the Canadian House of Commons to have their system adapted for our use," Decker said. "If it happens relatively quickly, they feel they can have it ready to go before the end of calendar 2017."

Decker noted a report on e-petitions was presented to the house in February 2016, which

included a recommendation that MPPs implement a electronic petitioning system for Queen's Park. The report was adopted by the legislature, the clerk said, "so, the house has lent its endorsement to the committee's recommendation that there be an e-petition system for the assembly."

But MPPs on the legislative assembly committee were still full of questions about the ins and outs of the proposed e-petition system.

"I still have lots of concerns about the staffing, the cost," Wong said. "We have to remember that once we open the floodgates to e-petitions, it's not just here for one term only, right? It's for life."

The committee was told the House of Commons' e-petition platform, which the proposed Queen's Park system would be adapted from, launched in November 2015, and that more than 250 e-petitions have been on the system.

"Some of them have thousands and thousands of signatures," said Decker. "So they've built and designed a very stable system that, I think, is a good option for us."

"I just want to reinforce that it is a very stable and secure solution that they've provided in the House of Commons, and it meets all of our requirements," added Kirk Cameron, director of technology services for the legislature.

If Ontario goes the House of Commons route, no new staff would be required at Queen's Park, the committee was told.

Furthermore, the proposed Queen's Park system wouldn't require e-petitions to be sponsored by MPPs. However, they would only be put up on the assembly's website if five other Ontarians support it, and the e-petition would only be presented to the house if they obtain 500 signatures. There would also be no cost to the e-petition's presenter.

Decker said the House of Commons system requires a person to provide their name, email address and postal code if they want to craft an e-petition.

"Your signature will not go on until you receive an email at that email address and you confirm that that was you who wanted to sign that e-petition, and then it will go on," Decker explained. "It's prohibited, under their system, to make a false signature on an e-petition. I guess really all that one can do is depend on people's honour."

"If I'm signing it off as 'I, Elvis Presley' or whatever—there has to be a validated email attached to that signature in order for it to trigger a response," said NDP MPP Michael Mantha.

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#### 4). The Funding Portal – Week of March 6

By: Sabrina Nanji

Who got funding from the government this week?

Funding for the week of March 6, 2017 under Canadian federal and provincial grants and business incentive programs reached \$560.3 million, down from \$616 million during the previous week.

**Top Sector.** Community & Nonprofit is the top sector this week, attracting \$525.2 million, 94 per cent of total incentives.

**Top Region.** BC is the top province this week, securing \$502.7 million, accounting for 90 per cent of total national disbursements this week.

**Top Recipients in Ontario.**

- 304 festivals and events receive \$19 million in funding from Celebrate Ontario.
- The Coaches Association of Ontario receives \$326,700 in funding under the Ontario150 Signature Initiative to increase opportunities for women and girls in sport.
- Planned Parenthood Ottawa receives \$285,000 from the federal government to improve services for women in the Ottawa area who are experiencing gender-based violence, in particular, violence related to sexual and reproductive coercion.

**Sectors**

[\[https://fundingportal.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/image-66.png\]](https://fundingportal.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/image-66.png)

**Provinces**

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