

This Morning's Issues - October 18, 2017

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Cabinet Office/Corporate Issues Morning Issues List

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Ed Clark To Speak To The Canadian Club Of Toronto About Bids For Amazon -- Premier Wynne's Business Advisor – Ed Clark – is speaking to the Canadian Club of Toronto at 8:15 this morning, about the province's approach to supporting Ontario bids for Amazon. Following his speech, Deb Matthews, Deputy Premier and Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development, Brad Duguid, Minister of Economic Development and Growth, and Reza Moridi, Minister of Research, Innovation and Science, will hold media availability. The event is being held at the Royal York.

Prime Minister Trudeau And Premier Wynne To Deliver Remarks – Premier Wynne and Prime Minister Trudeau are delivering remarks at 8:30 this evening at the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto International Leadership Reunion. The event is being held at the Royal Ontario Museum.

Auditor General's Report Examining Fair Hydro Plan – There is widespread media coverage of the Auditor General's report into the Fair Hydro Plan. **Tone negative.**

Toronto Sun Columnist Lorrie Goldstein -- Grits Broke Every Rule In The Book – Goldstein writes that normally, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk's complete evisceration of how Premier Kathleen Wynne plans to pay for her "Fair Hydro Plan" would be an election game changer. That is, the final nail in the coffin of the government's financial credibility, leading to its defeat at the polls in June. Lysyk's findings, released Tuesday, are devastating for the Liberals and call to mind former federal auditor general Sheila Fraser's devastating 2004 report that found federal officials in Jean Chretien's government "broke just about every rule in the book" in awarding contracts during the Liberal sponsorship scandal. Goldstein points out the political fallout from that saw Paul Martin's Liberals reduced to a minority government in '04, before losing to the Harper Conservatives in '06, after 13 years in power. Except for one difference. That is that the Ontario Liberals have survived scandals - e-Health, Ornge, cancelled gas plants, green energy - that should have ended their 14-year political dynasty years ago.

Ottawa Columnist David Reevely: Ontario 'Fair Hydro Plan' Renders Province's Books

Unreliable, Auditor Warns -- Hiding billions of dollars the Ontario government is borrowing to lower electricity bills for a few years will cost hydro users an extra \$4 billion, the province's auditor general reported Tuesday morning. Maybe worse, Bonnie Lysyk said in a special report on the Liberals' "Fair Hydro Plan," the tricks the government is using throw doubt on all the province's books. The government, citizens, auditors and giant institutions that lend the province money are pretty much operating in a post-truth universe, where what the Liberals say is going on with Ontario's finances has begun to drift from any previously understood shared reality. What the Liberals have done "would be unacceptable in the private sector, and we maintain that this is also unacceptable in the public sector," Lysyk reported. "If the consolidated financial statements are so unreliable that an adverse opinion is warranted, terms like 'balanced budget, 'deficit, 'asset' and 'net debt' will be meaningless."

Report Alleges Environmental Warnings Over Chemical Dangers Ignored

-- The Star is detailing a "leaked report" that alleges Ontario's Environment Ministry ignored warnings from its own staff engineers regarding the extent of the public health dangers posed by petrochemical plants around the Sarnia region. Known as "Chemical Valley" for its proliferation of chemical plants, the industrial area of Sarnia boxes in the First Nations community of Aamjiwnaang on three sides, and the report calls into question whether or not the residents of the First Nation are being properly informed about when hazardous substances and carcinogens are leaked by the plants. The report was prepared by a union representing the Professional Engineers of the Government of Ontario, and it "claims Ministry managers are muzzling and excluding key engineers that raise concerns with respect to public safety," and also that "the government refused to publish a 2014 report detailing the issues." Ontario Environment Minister Chis Ballard said that he intends to discuss the report with the engineers' union, and that the government intends to fund a study into the "health effects of air pollution on the residents of Aamjiwnaang and Chemical Valley," though Minister Ballard declined to commit to a timeline or specific process that the study would be undertaking.

Students Caught In The Crossfire Of College Strike

-- 300,000 students are affected by the Ontario college strike as the OPSEU petitions for more full-time staff positions and job security for part-time professors. This includes Humber College Students Kate Nodwell, who fears that she will not graduate from her three-year public relations program, as she has booked a ticket to England in January to start an internship. The internship is a graduation requirement, as are her courses this current semester. Among students affected are those enrolled in collaborative nursing programs between 13 universities and 21 colleges. Premier Kathleen Wynne urged the union and colleges to resume negotiations and conclude the strike.

Bed Crisis' At Hospital -- The North Bay Regional Health Centre is experiencing a 'bed crisis,' in that there are not enough beds to accommodate the surge of patients being admitted to its emergency department. As a result, patients may be relocated or discharged, surgeries may be postponed or cancelled, and some patients may be placed in "unconventional beds." Tiz Silveri, Vice-President of Clinical and Chief Nursing Executive, emphasizes that patients who require urgent care will always be treated, and cites the closing of Lady Isabelle Nursing home, which had 66 beds, as a contributing factor to the surge. She urges people to be familiar with non-urgent healthcare options such as Telehealth Ontario or walk-in clinics, in order to prevent unnecessary emergency room visits.

Niagara Falls: "Solution Needed for Track; Horwath," -- NDP leader Andrea Horwath says that although the province plans to inject \$15.8 million in funding over the next two years into the 120-year-old Fort Erie Racetrack, a "much greater commitment" will be required to keep the venue open and operating. Horwath was joined by area officials at a press conference in which she pressed the provincial government to make racing in Fort Erie and the rest of the province a priority, especially to help the industry recover from "damage done" by the cancellation of their slot-machine program being cancelled in 2012. "What the Liberals have put horse-people through around the province is absolutely unacceptable," said Horwath, and recommended that the province commit to providing "a guaranteed

amount of race dates favourable to the Fort Erie Live Racing Consortium, new revenue streams, and a say in industry-wide policies through inclusion in the province's racing alliance.

Cami's Demise Days Away When Strike Settled – The London Free Press reports, labour sources claim General Motors was within days of shutting down its Cami Assembly plant in Ingersoll for good when it settled with its striking workers. Tim McKinnon, chairperson of Unifor Local 199 at GM Canada's plant in St. Catharines, which supplies Cami with transmissions says, the automaker notified Cami suppliers last week to prepare "supply lines" to Mexico, where it planned to shift production. "It is 100 per cent real. We talked to our suppliers and were given notice to get ready to ship parts to Mexico. Once they start going that way, it is hard to turn it around," said McKinnon. Workers at Cami Monday ratified a new four year collective agreement after a 30-day strike that provides job security language in the form of costly payouts to workers if GM shuts the plant now.

Province Is Hobbling LRT Progress – The Hamilton Spectator reports, say yes. Say no. But say something. For reasons not immediately apparent, the provincial government appears to be dragging its feet on answering a crucial LRT question. Two months back, Hamilton council asked that the HSR be allowed to run the system - operate it, maintain it or some combination of the two. We opined at the time that the timing of that question was unfortunate, coming very late in the process and sending a signal of equivocation to the province, which is all too familiar with seeing that characteristic in Hamilton's collective leadership. Regardless, the request was made and can't now be taken back. It's not a complicated question. The province can say yes to operation and maintenance. Most agree that's unlikely. It would put unappealing restrictions on the private-sector LRT operator, which has yet to be selected. And HSR staff has no current experience with maintaining light rail.

Hospital Violence 'Rampant' - The North Bay Nugget reports, a small investment in a Plexiglass barrier would have prevented a patient from stabbing a Perth/Smiths Falls hospital admitting clerk in the neck. That according to the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU). Better alarms would have enabled nurses at Hamilton's St. Joseph's Health Centre to summon help when a patient, asked to take his medication, became violent. A nurse at a Royal Ottawa site was stabbed repeatedly by a previously violent patient and the hospital fined earlier this summer for failing to "reassess the risk of workplace violence" as required by the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

"Violence against hospital staff is real and rampant," says Michael Hurley, president of OCHU, the hospital division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) in Ontario.

Minister Orders 'Second Look' At 401 Median - The Chatham Daily News reports, Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca has ordered ministry staff to take a "second look" at the kind of highway barriers that will be installed along a 136-kilometre stretch of Highway 401 west of London to Tilbury that has seen five fatal crashes in six months.

An MTO Spokesperson is quoted "Following the Minister's meeting with Allyson Storey, MPP Rick Nicholls, and other safety advocates at the legislature... he has asked ministry staff to take a second look to make sure that we're choosing the best option for the new median barrier, as well as look for ways to implement the barriers sooner. We are working on these options now." She added "The minister has... asked staff to take a second look to make sure that we're choosing the best option for the new median barrier."

Bill Would Give Women Option Of Refusing To Wear High Heels – The Ottawa Citizen reports, women in Ontario would be protected from being required to wear high heels at work under a bill introduced Tuesday. The private member's bill from Cristina Martins, a Liberal MPP, would amend the province's Occupational Health and Safety Act to prohibit employers from mandating workers to wear unsafe footwear as part of dress codes. Martins says it's an issue that is a particular problem in restaurants and bars, with some women coming forward and saying that as a result of them not wearing the mandatory high heels that they've missed shifts, they've been asked to stay home and in some cases lost their jobs - mostly in the food industry and the hospitality industry.

Province urged to boost the North - The North Bay Nugget reports, Nipissing MPP Vic Fedeli has echoed North Bay council's call for the province to stem the flow of youth and skilled labour from northeastern Ontario. North Bay council agreed in June to lobby the province to create incentives to encourage people and business to move north. Council notes "the net out-migration of young people and skilled labour will negatively impact the long-term economic viability and general social conditions of the North," Fedeli said in the legislature Tuesday. "But they also note and again I quote 'Northern Ontario has surplus infrastructure and represents an affordable alternative for residents, business and governments.' "That's why they're asking this government 'to undertake appropriate actions through tax reductions, tax exemptions and relocation initiatives' and create "incentives for businesses, institutions and government departments to operate in Northern Ontario."

Gloves Come Off As Trade Talks Hit Impasse – The Toronto Star reports the vast divide between Canada and the United States over the future of North American trade burst into public view yesterday as top officials for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and President Donald Trump traded blame for their negotiating impasse. In an acrimonious joint appearance that trade experts called highly unusual, Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer exchanged sharp criticism while standing a metre from each other on a stage in Washington. Their remarks went beyond the standard posturing over particular subjects of dispute. Their speeches confirmed that important parts of the NAFTA talks are going poorly, hampered by disagreements not only about policy but also about basic facts of continental trade.