

Briefing for February 13, 2017

Your morning briefing2

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13.02.2017 [Geoff Zochodne](#) 0

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Headlines

Today, the world learns the fate [of jointly sponsored public pension plan assets](#) Ontario's Liberal government is dying to get back on its balance sheet — perhaps the sexiest political issue of our time. Indeed, a group of independent experts will be at Queen's Park this morning to render their judgment in the case of Auditor General v. Wynne, in which the AG contends the government can't claim those assets in determining the province's bottom line. That accounting change has (temporarily, at least) inflated the government's debt and deficit numbers, but The *Toronto Star* [reported](#) the experts will side with the government, and [also recently reported](#) that at least one of the pension plans agrees its assets should be boons for the province's budget. Get your calculators ready.

The Liberal government is zeroing in on how it will provide new help for electricity customers, [CBC reports](#). Citing sources, CBC says the government is particularly looking at smoothing out global adjustment costs to consumers and reforming existing support programs. That new help is supposed to be announced before the 2017 budget is tabled, so we won't be waiting too much longer.

The Ontario Progressive Conservatives are breaching the walls of the "Liberal Fortress of Toronto," [according to a recent Forum Research poll](#). The survey pegs PC support with Toronto voters at 35 per cent, the Liberals at 34 per cent, and the NDP at 22 per cent.

In unveiling its "Populism Project," which is investigating whether **Donald Trump** can happen here, [the Canadian Press found](#) people in Smith Falls, Ont., are really pushing to become the place the province picks to test out a guaranteed annual income.

Someday, **Jagmeet Singh** will officially announce if he is or is not running for the leadership of the federal NDP. But in the meantime, Singh, currently the deputy leader of the Ontario NDP, is getting a fair share of publicity. The latest outfit to take a crack at interviewing the NDP MPP is [GQ](#), which still couldn't get a definitive answer out of Singh on if he'll take the plunge ([neither could the Globe and Mail](#)). "I haven't decided yet," Singh said.

Singh was also asked in [the interview](#) if he could take our Prime Minister in a fight. Quoth Singh: "Particularly if [**Justin Trudeau**] did [mixed martial arts]—that's my background so I could definitely take him on in that style. But my boxing is pretty solid, so I think I can definitely give him a run for his money."

Now, *QP Briefing* is not endorsing a political system that elects our leaders via cage fighting. But consider the following, imaginary lede: "The NDP formed a majority government last night after tapping out the Liberals via rear naked choke in the second round."

Prime Minister Trudeau and U.S. President Donald Trump are set to meet today in Washington. But prior to that, Trump officials presented Canada's defence minister with a cake he brought back to Ottawa, [the Star reports](#). To...sweeten the deal, no doubt. Yeah, sorry.

Ontario cabinet ministers have been given a handy sheet that details reasons why Trump shouldn't clamp down on trade between the province and the states, [CP reports](#). The president, uh, [likes graphics](#).

The contract extension the Liberal government inked with Catholic teachers also freezes out the local union chapters, [the Toronto Star notes](#). The Liberals set up a two-tier bargaining system for nailing down education-sector contracts that see big picture items like wages dealt with at a central table and local issues handled between the school boards and the various union chapters. Under that system, however, the government had helped unions cover their bargaining expenses, which led to then-education minister **Liz Sandals** remarking that, "[We know what 100 pizzas costs](#)." It did not go over well, and the Catholic contract extension leaves the local agreements untouched for the time being.

The Progressive Conservatives want Hydro One salaries [back on the sunshine list](#). That's probably not going to happen.

The Special Investigations Unit hasn't published an annual report in nearly 20 months, [the Star reports](#). After some arduous number-crunching, *QP Briefing* can confirm that's more than a year.

In case you missed our stories from Friday, here they are:

- [‘Could be a busy portfolio’: Tories, Grits trade barbs over newly minted ethics critic](#)
- [Government eyes risks to Ontario’s future: Protectionism, a weak U.S. and robots stealing our jobs](#)
- [Toronto mayor aims to stay neutral in 2018 Ontario election after road toll snub](#)
- [Leone: Ontario’s ‘art of the deal’](#)

Down Windsor way, [Postmedia reports](#) the local school board is scrapping all student field trips to the United States, claiming the country is a bit too unwieldy at the moment for visits.

In the opinion pages:

- Martin Regg Cohn [ponders](#) what the Ontario Liberals can do to bring hydro costs to heel
- Lorrie Goldstein [marvels](#) at Ontario's hefty health-care costs

Events

8:30 a.m.

Premier Wynne to attend a Caucus Retreat. Chelsea Hotel, 33 Gerrard Street West, Toronto.

10:00 a.m.

Independent expert advisors will present their advice and recommendations on the application of public sector accounting standards to two of Ontario's jointly sponsored pension plans. Queen's Park.