

This Morning's Issues -- October 19, 2017

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Cabinet Office/Corporate Issues Morning Issues List

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Ontario Financial Accountability Officer to discuss Long-Term Budget Outlook report – The Temporary

Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario J. David Wake, and FAO Chief Economist David West discuss the Long-term Budget Outlook report this morning. A media briefing is scheduled for 9:30, with a 10am news conference in the Media Studio.

PC Leader Brown to make an announcement -- PC Leader Patrick Brown will make an announcement at 10 this morning about government accountability. The news conference is being held in the PC caucus boardroom.

MPP Potts to comment on his bill, the 'Fairness In Consumer Reporting Act' -- Toronto: MPP Arthur Potts will comment on his bill, the 'Fairness In Consumer Reporting Act' at 9 this morning in the Media Studio.

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Environment Ministry Faces Criticism Over Chemical Valley Report -- The Star is reporting on a "fierce blowback" faced by the provincial government after news outlets published allegations on Wednesday that the Ministry of the Environment ignored warnings from its own engineers over the health dangers posed by a ring of industrial chemical plants outside of Sarnia. The location of the plants, often called "Chemical Valley", borders the Aamjiwnaang First Nation on three sides and has been the site of numerous leaks of hazardous chemicals and carcinogens such as benzene. Ontario NDP leader Andrea Horwath called details of the allegations "frightening" and "unbelievable", and said the inaction by the Ministry is "absolutely irresponsible. If this is happening in Sarnia, where else is it happening?" During question period at Queen's Park, Environment Minister Chris Ballard said he'd have some "tough questions" for his Ministry over the allegations.

Ailing Former GE Plant Workers Pushing Labour Ministry For Help -- The Toronto Star has a

front page article this morning about a group of ailing former employees of the General Electric plant in Peterborough who were at Queen's Park yesterday, petitioning the Ministry of Labour to keep its pledge to aid the suffering retirees. The group believe they contracted a variety of debilitating illnesses such as cancer through years of exposure to asbestos and other harmful chemicals used at the plant-- a facility that a recent survey by Unifor found to have contributed to an "epidemic" of workplace sicknesses in staff employed there between 1945 and 2000. NDP MPP Cindy Forster says the former GE workers had been promised \$2 million in funding by the Ministry for a "special, locally-based team to help workers build their WSIB claims," but they were later told that funding would be halved. In any case, Forster said, any amount of money has yet to materialize. The group is also hoping that the WSIB might reconsider the 250 previously rejected claims made by their members over the years. Last month, a WSIB spokesperson said that "a review team would look at both cancer and non-cancer claims" made by former plant workers.

Ontario Government Hoping Investment in Tech Talent Will Attract Amazon -- Ed Clark, the former TD Bank president who is now heading up the provincial government's bid to land the Amazon corporation's proposed second headquarters, said in a speech Wednesday that Ontario "is not offering any new financial incentives to Amazon." Municipalities across North America are offering the e-commerce leader a variety of subsidies and last grants in hopes of enticing the new HQ to land in their area and bring along and expected 50,000 new jobs. Clark is touting an educational investment pledge of \$30 million made by the province in order to expand the pool of tech experts and engineers available should Amazon choose to set up in Ontario. "We don't need to buy Amazon to come here, because we have the competitiveness and the best talent in North America today," added Economic Development Minister Brad Duguid of the province's bid, which faces a substantial obstacle in that the current US administration wants to prevent American companies from relocating outside their borders. "We know that the ultimate decision may not be based on business metrics alone," said Clark of the cross-border pressures. "These days, politics south of the border is unpredictable."

Toronto Star Columnist Martin Regg Cohn -- AG is a watchdog who bristles at being watched -- Bonnie Lysyk is fighting another rearguard action against the Liberal plan to curb hydro rates. The auditor made headlines this week by accusing the government of short-circuiting the accounting rules with complex financial manoeuvres that could add \$4 billion in borrowing costs over 30 years. Lysyk doesn't quibble with their plan to cut hydro rates by 25 per cent, but that her quibble is over tactics - that the Liberals are borrowing the money through Ontario Power Generation (OPG) instead of carrying it on the government's own balance sheet. Cohn says the last time Lysyk attacked the government's deficit calculations; an outside panel of experts rejected her arguments - because not even an auditor can make a surplus disappear from a balance sheet. There is no permanent arbiter for auditors, but Lysyk is no longer the last word on accounting disputes - merely one of many voices, right or wrong. Expect that voice to grow louder next year when she formally assesses the 2018-19 spring budget - and once again challenges Liberal claims of deficit elimination.

CTV Toronto had a follow up report about the Auditor General's Fair Hydro Plan Report. Paul Bliss focused on the opposition calling for the resignation of the Energy and Finance Minister's. **Tone negative. Report carried on CTV affiliates in Barrie and Sudbury.**

Toronto Sun Columnist Mark Bonokoski -- 'As wrong as wrong can be' -- Bonokoski has a critical piece about the governments Fair Hydro Plan accounting, citing the Auditor General's report this week. He says the government has essentially kept the costs off the public books by figuratively going to a loan shark instead of a government lender where interest rates are less onerous. Bonokoski says \$5.5 million is being spent to run ads on radio and television to tell voters that their 25% cut in hydro

rates is all on the up-and-up. He adds, the "Fair Energy Plan" adds \$28 billion in debt, and \$4 billion in interest payments.

Ottawa Columnist David Reevely: Ontario Asking Court to Toss Wind Far Suit -- Government lawyers are attempting to have a six-year-old, \$500-million lawsuit against Trillium Power Wind Corp. over the cancellation of an enormous wind-power station thrown out, as it is "plainly devoid of merit." Trillium alleges that in 2011, the provincial government targeted Trillium's plans to build a massive windfarm by freezing all windmills, and that evidence to support this was deleted illegally by former Premier Dalton McGuinty's Chief of Staff, David Livingston and Livingston's deputy Laura Miller. Trillium's lawyer, Morris Cooper, says an attempt to have the case thrown out is an "abuse of process and intended solely to to delay the upcoming trial."

Inquiry Hears Of Ongoing Risks -- In Woodstock, the town where former nurse Elizabeth Wettlaufer murdered seven long-term care residents, a public inquiry headed by Justice Eileen Gillese was launched on Wednesday that brought on warnings from insiders that residents are still not safe. Personal support worker and Vice-President of the Unifor union's Local 636, Melissa Holden, asserts nursing home residents require at least 4.8 hours of daily care, but currently only receive up to 1.9 hours. Unless more resources are allocated, more abuses will occur, she says. Janice Duffy, whose father is a nursing home resident, says "If this was a daycare or even a dog care centre, those children and those puppies would be removed or there would be a public outcry."

No Answer Yet For School Bus Driver Shortage -- Public and Catholic school boards in Hamilton are both still looking for bus drivers to fill 18 positions, causing unprecedentedly late student pick-ups and drop-offs. The Hamilton-Wentworth Student Transportation Services held a meeting to discuss the issue on Tuesday. Among strategies discussed at the meeting is to connect with a new bus company and offer financial incentives to retired drivers to return to work. The Ministry of Education will soon re-examine its school transportation funding model, as the current process has "created a great deal of instability for the boards and the bus operators," according to Catholic board chair Pat Daly.

Double Price Of Cigarettes Over Time, Ontario Told -- The Ottawa Citizen reports, Ontario should raise taxes on cigarettes, ban anyone under 21 from buying them, and impose a levy on tobacco companies, a government-commissioned report recommends. The report suggests ways to reduce the percentage of Ontarians who smoke from 17 per cent to less than five per cent by 2035, a target identified by the federal government. "The magnitude of this epidemic is absolutely appalling," said smoking cessation expert and report co-chair Dr. Andrew Pipe. "The fact that 16,000 Ontarians will die every year as a consequence of the use of tobacco-industry products is actually totally disconcerting to those of us in the health-care professions." Ontario has the second-lowest price for cigarettes in Canada - \$102.40 for a carton of 200 - and it should be at least doubled by regularly increasing taxes, the report recommends. New revenue from those taxes should be reinvested into controlling tobacco, it says. The province's most recent budget said tobacco tax rates would be increased by \$10 per carton of 200 cigarettes over three years, starting with increasing the tax rate by one cent to 16.475 cents per cigarette this year. Health Minister Eric Hoskins said the government is considering the report and that "feasibility is part of that analysis."

No Talks Scheduled As Colleges Strike Continues -- The St. Catharines Standard reports, classes remain shut down as a strike continues at Niagara College after teaching staff walked out Monday. Niagara College is among 24 colleges on strike after negotiations between the Ontario Public Service Employees Union and the College Employer Council broke down on Sunday at midnight after the sides couldn't reach an agreement. Terry

Poirier, chief steward of OPSEU Local 242, said there has been no word yet of talks recommencing and they are waiting to hear from the mediator. He said over the past few days, he and those on the picket line handing out information about why they are on strike at the college's entrances have had a lot of positive support. He said he has also had people tell him to "get back to work," but he has a response for them. "We want to go back to work under conditions that are better than we are currently experiencing," he said Wednesday afternoon.

Gap Bites Into ER Resources - The Chatham Daily News reports, a gap in dental insurance coverage is resulting in more people seeking treatment at the local emergency department. Chatham-Kent sees an average of about 750 visits to the emergency department for oral-related diseases and 250 visits for oral related injuries each year, according to a new report from the local health unit. The average in both of these cases has also been higher than the provincial average since 2006. Dr. David Colby, medical officer of health for the Chatham-Kent public health unit, said this is "very concerning" because dental problems should not take up emergency room resources.

"It's a court of last resort," he said following Wednesday's board of health meeting. "It's not that you can't get anything there, but there are no dentists that work there. We don't have a dental on-call roster for emergency."

Fedeli Updates Wood Bill - The North Bay Nugget reports, Nipissing MPP Vic Fedeli has introduced an updated version of the wood frame construction bill he tabled in the Ontario Legislature earlier this year. The Ontario Forestry Revitalization Act (14-storey wood buildings), 2017 received first reading in the Ontario Legislature Wednesday. The act would amend the Ontario Building Code to allow for wood frame construction to be used in mid-rise buildings up to 14 stories, instead of the current six stories. "This change will further boost the Northern forestry industry, and create jobs and growth," Fedeli said. Fedeli originally introduced a private members' bill in 2012 seeking an increase in the maximum height of wood-frame buildings from four to six stories. That change was eventually adopted by the government in 2015. In May, Fedeli introduced a bill seeking an increase from six to 12 stories, which would accommodate a building being planned by George Brown College in Toronto.

Widen 401: Mayors - The Brockville Recorder reports, Eastern Ontario mayors plan a renewed push to get the provincial Ministry of Transportation to widen Highway 401 to six lanes throughout this region.

Prescott Mayor Brett Todd, vice-chairman of the Eastern Ontario Mayors' Caucus, said widening the busy highway is obviously the best way to improve road safety and the hauling of hazardous goods.

Todd said the widening idea was raised at last week's meeting between Transport Minister Steven Del Duca and 10 local mayors as well at a recent meeting of the Eastern Ontario Mayors' Caucus.

"Speaking just for myself, this is almost certainly the one move that would make the most difference on the 401, but it's also of course the most expensive," Todd said.

Todd noted that the ministry has widened the 401 throughout Central and Southwestern Ontario, but the highway remains four lanes from Kingston to the Quebec border.

Bill 148 "Too Much Too Soon" Says Chamber -- The Upper Canada Valley Chamber of

Commerce looks to contest Bill 148, which proposes to increase minimum wage up to \$15 an hour by January 2019, and include paid sick days for all workers and paid vacation after five years with the same employer. Karl Baldauf, Ontario Chamber of Commerce Vice-President of Policy and Government Relations, expressed concerns about the timing of the change, as it “puts employers in a very challenging position and it also forces new costs and stringent rules on them. In an environment where costs are going to go up, they have fewer options from which to determine how to accommodate those new costs.”