Briefing July 11, 2017

Your morning briefing

11.07.2017 Christopher Reynolds 0

Headlines

As province-wide hearings on employment changes enter their second day, a coalition of Ontario business associations says the the proposed minimum wage hike goes too far, says the *Toronto Star*. *CTV* also reports on the discussions around the $15 minimum wage, finding a mixed response.

Meanwhile, a group of high-powered realtors have banded together to lobby the province to tone down an overhaul to the generally developer-friendly Ontario Municipal Board, the *Globe and Mail* reports.

Our stories from Monday:

- Summer hearings for new labour law kicks off with focus on $15 minimum wage
- PCs promise to give greenhouse growers a carbon tax break
- Consumer services minister open to further clamp-downs on travel ad tricks
- Seen: Liberal MPP Mario Sergio to retire ahead of 2018 election
- Seen: Ontario sending firefighters to besieged British Columbia

Condo sales on homes priced $1 million or more in Toronto have grown nearly 100 per cent over 2016, making the city far and away the country's leading luxury real estate market.

The government is struggling to provide proper care to seniors, due to wait times and other barriers, writes the *Globe*.

Muskoka's history, indigenous architectural rebound and reliance on year-round residents all come into focus via *TVO*'s lens.

In Cornwall, a complainant has challenged a local pool's policy preventing topless swimming with an appeal to the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal, the *Ottawa Sun* reported.

In the opinion pages:

- André Picard says Canadians could learn a thing or two from the Netherlands' hottest trend:

  "Buurtzorg," or neighbourhood care.

Events

9:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

Public committee hearings on labour law reforms by the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. Best Western Hotel & Conference Centre, Regency Ballroom, 700 Lakeshore Drive, North Bay, Ont.
Live streaming

11 a.m.

Health Minister Eric Hoskins and Barrie MPP Ann Hoggarth to make an announcement. Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital, 4th floor dining area, 170 Colborne St. W., Orillia, Ont.

PCs promise to give greenhouse growers a carbon tax break

10.07.2017 Geoff Zochodne 0

Progressive Conservative Leader **Patrick Brown** still supports putting a price on carbon emissions as a way to combat climate change. What's more, the Tory chief now says his party would give Ontario's greenhouse industry a break on its carbon taxes.

"The next election will be about change for the better versus the status quo," Brown said Monday in a release. The release bore a dateline from Kingsville, a southwestern Ontario town. The region is the hub of the province's fast-growing greenhouse sector.

"We will scrap Wynne's Cap-and-Trade Scheme and give the greenhouse industry relief," added Brown. "Life will be better under our government for the greenhouse industry."

Brown is on the record supporting a revenue-neutral or revenue-negative carbon tax on greenhouse gas emissions, rather than the Liberal government's cap-and-trade system, which the PC leader has vowed to do away with. Cap and trade began in Ontario in January, and two auctions of carbon-emitting permits have been held since, increasing fuel costs for consumers and businesses.

But the Tories pointed out that other provinces, namely Alberta and British Columbia, cut their greenhouse farmers some slack. In B.C., the industry gets a grant covering 80 per cent of the carbon tax they pay on natural gas and propane used to heat greenhouses and produce carbon dioxide. The gas is consumed by the plants and turned into oxygen (also known as photosynthesis).

Ontario's cap-and-trade costs apply to natural gas distributors, who pass the cost on to their customers via their bills. The PCs are suggesting that a Tory government would give greenhouse growers a discount on the province's carbon price, as is being done out west.

"Since greenhouses use the carbon dioxide they produce, there is a business case to exempt them from carbon pricing," said the Tory press release. "In addition, our greenhouse industry competes against jurisdictions without carbon taxes and therefore they should not pay carbon taxes on products they export."

Brown tweeted out a video Monday afternoon of him strolling through a greenhouse and vowing to scrap the Liberals' cap-and-trade system and help growers. "If I become premier, the only way taxes will go is down," he says in the clip.

Greenhouse farmers had already been voicing concerns about the Liberal government's policies, particularly the plan to increase the province's minimum wage from its current $11.40 to $15 by 2019. "For a sector still recovering from an onslaught of regulatory burden and government-imposed costs, such as cap and trade, paying an additional $3.60/hour for each worker is an insurmountable hurdle," said the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers in a June 1 release.

And the province’s greenhouse industry is on the upswing. The OGVG said in a fact sheet that their industry employs approximately 13,000 people. The farm gate value of their crop in 2015 was also around $820 million, most of which is exported to the United States.

But Brown's embrace of carbon pricing has caused him some trouble among diehard anti-taxers. As one example, former Tory **Jack MacLaren** said he opposed such a thing, a stance he is now free to take as an ex-PC MPP and current member of the Trillium Party.

UPDATE: Environment Minister **Glen Murray**'s office responds:

"Ontario needs a realistic approach that balances action with affordability to fight climate change. Patrick Brown’s carbon tax scheme – which he carefully avoided mentioning today – accomplishes neither. His scheme would cost families and businesses four times more without guaranteeing any reductions. It would also scrap the investments we are making to help businesses reduce costs, including up to $115 million over four years for agricultural businesses like greenhouses.

The harm Patrick Brown would cause to the sector doesn’t end there. His opposition to the Fair Hydro Plan means greenhouses using under 500 kW would no longer be eligible for the 25 percent reduction on their bills. Should he choose to scrap the Industrial Conservation Initiative, larger greenhouses would lose the chance to save as much as one third off their bills too. Our recently announced $19 million Greenhouse Competitiveness and Innovation Initiative, intended to help the industry lower production costs, increase productivity and improve quality, could also be at risk.

The reality is that despite opposition claims, Ontario’s greenhouse industry is growing. The independent Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers expects the industry to keep growing by about 150 acres a year. Producers like NatureFresh and Greenhill Produce have also recently announced expansions totally over $100 million that will create hundreds of new jobs, building on the 81,000 jobs already here.

In this environment, Ontario needs a balanced plan to fight climate change. And with the federal government moving forward with a plan that will soon see all of Canada covered by a carbon price, we need a solution that makes sense for Ontario. That’s why our plan, which includes a cap on the pollution businesses can release into the air, is best. It guarantees emission reductions at the cheapest price for people and the economy while also reinvesting every dollar to help keep costs for business low. Patrick Brown’s inefficient, ineffective and unaffordable carbon tax scheme doesn’t even come close."