

Queen's Park notes

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For the week of April 24-28, 2017

This past week's legislative agenda was dominated by the release of the Liberals' [annual budget](#) for the government. With added political pressure because of Premier Kathleen Wynne's low public opinion approval ratings and the pending June 2018 provincial election, the Liberals proposed a number of initiatives that they hope will bring them victory in 2018. The centerpiece of the budget was the Liberals' plan to institute a public pharmacare program for those 24 years of age and younger, effective January 1, 2018.

Soon after the budget's release, Liberal MPPs continued the tradition of holding breakfast meetings in their ridings the next day profusely lauding the \$465 Million annual pharmacare announcement. And, with positive media coverage of the announcement, Liberals hope they have a political winner.

However, the Liberals' hopes may soon be tempered by the pending byelection in the recently vacated riding of Sault Ste. Marie by former Liberal Cabinet Minister, David Orazietti. With Orazietti resigning on December 31, 2016, Wynne has until June 30, 2017, to call the byelection. With a general election one year away and with a desire to allow her political team to enjoy this final summer vacation, it is likely that Wynne would call the byelection for a date no later than Thursday, June 29. And, with the Ontario Legislature adjourning no later than Thursday, June 1, a 28-day campaign would fit perfectly in that window.

The Liberals are hoping that the budget will give them a strong bounce into the byelection and the subsequent general election. And, with all three parties presenting former or current municipal politicians in the byelection, it will definitely be a heated contest.

For Wynne, the stakes in the byelection are very high. The Liberals have held the riding since Orazietti's first victory in 2003. A byelection loss in this northern Ontario riding would do great damage to the prospects of regaining the seat in the subsequent general election. It would also significantly erode Wynne's political outlook beyond her strong Greater Toronto Area base. If the Liberals were to lose the byelection, the pressure on Wynne to reconsider her political future would resume. For Wynne, if the Liberals can't win the byelection, she needs to hope that they are, at least, competitive. A poor showing by the Liberals would greatly demoralize Liberals and reignite questions about Wynne's continued leadership.

BUDGET 2017

The Liberals' 2017 budget included a number of initiatives that they hope will lay the groundwork for a successful re-election campaign in 2018. Besides the pharmacare announcement, the Liberals outlined the following plan:

- \$6.4 billion in new education funding over three years. This is an additional \$900 million from the previously announced \$5.5 billion in the 2016 budget (part of the recently negotiated extension of the collective agreements with education workers' unions, including OSSTF/FEESO)
- \$16 billion over ten years for new schools in high growth areas
- Increasing the minimum salary an individual needs to earn before they start repaying the provincial portion of OSAP loans from \$25,000 to \$35,000
- \$200 million over three years to help more First Nations students access high-quality postsecondary education and training opportunities
- Proclaimed the provincial budget is balanced and will remain so for at least the next two years, although \$10 billion is being added to the provincial debt
- Five new hospitals will be built in the province
- \$7 billion "Booster Shot" of new health care funding
- An additional \$30 billion to its long-term infrastructure plan

NEW BILLS INTRODUCED

BILL 124, RENTAL FAIRNESS ACT

In response to recent media articles on the rising rental costs in Ontario (particularly in Toronto) and NDP MPP Peter Tabuns' (Toronto—Danforth) [Bill 106, Rent Protection for All Tenants Act](#), Housing Minister Chris Ballard (Newmarket—Aurora) introduced Bill 124, *Rental Fairness Act*. The most significant part of Ballard's bill would expand rent control to include buildings built after 1991 and limitations on above-guideline rent increases.

BILL 125, INNOCENT PERSONS INSURANCE RECOVERY ACT

Liberal MPP Mike Colle (Eglinton—Lawrence) introduced Bill 125, *Innocent Persons Insurance Recovery Act*. Colle's bill would amend the *Insurance Act* by limiting referral fees charged by lawyers. As well, it would limit contingency fees to 15 per cent of settlements awarded to accident victims.

BILL 126, ILLEGAL PILL PRESS ACT

PC MPP Michael Harris (Kitchener—Conestoga) introduced Bill 126, *Illegal Pill Press Act*. The bill would amend the *Drug and Pharmacies Regulation Act* to prohibit a person from possessing or using designated pharmaceutical equipment unless the person is a pharmacist or a person acting under the supervision of a pharmacist.

BILL 127, STRONGER, HEALTHIER ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2017

This bill outlines the budget legislative details outlined by Finance Minister Charles Sousa (Mississauga—South).

BILLS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

BILL 114, ANTI-RACISM ACT

The Minister of Children and Youth Services and the Anti-Racism Directorate, Michael Coteau (Don Valley East), saw his Bill 114, *Anti-Racism Act*, unanimously pass second reading and be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government. Among some of the provisions of the bill, there would be a requirement for the Government of Ontario to maintain an anti-racism strategy that aims to eliminate systemic racism and advance racial equity. The strategy must include initiatives to eliminate systemic racism and advance racial equity, as well as include targets and indicators to measure the strategy's effectiveness.

IN OTHER NEWS

ONTARIO NDP UNVEIL UNIVERSAL PHARMACARE PROPOSAL

Days before the Liberals proposed a pharmacare program in their budget for youth aged 24 years old and younger, the Ontario NDP Leader announced, at her party's biennial convention, that a NDP government would implement universal pharmacare for all Ontarians. Andrea Horwath's plan would cover 125 common drugs at a cost of \$475 million (\$10 million more than the Liberals' budget plan). Horwath added that she would like to see the pharmacare program expand to include all drugs. With both the Liberals and NDP now proposing pharmacare programs, it is likely that this issue will be prominently featured in the next election, with each party trying to outmatch the other.