

INSIDE QUEEN'S PARK

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GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

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Ontario Chamber of Commerce – As its staunch ally on the HST, OCC wants the government to stay the course on tax reform and take other measures to foster a competitive business climate, including stricter tests on regulatory changes and red-tape. OCC advocates measures to make government more affordable and efficient by holding spending below economic growth, addressing the overall level of public debt, launching actuarial analysis of health spending, adopting a long-term transportation plan, mandating competitive bidding for provision of all public services and programs, and **streamlining the EA process**.

Ontario Federation of Agriculture – OFA reports that Ontario's local food supply is threatened by the negative margins of the farm sector. Changes are needed in the AgriSustainability program and other federal-provincial schemes. OFA endorses the food donation tax credit proposed by Ontario food banks, and calls for speedier conversion of Nanticoke for energy from biomass, action on OFA's predators task force and compensation for crop damage by wildlife.

Ontario Lung Association – With an estimated 500K Ontarians afflicted by congestive pulmonary disease (COPD), the Ontario Lung Association wants government to support both: COPD maintenance and exercise programs, proven to achieve greater patient self-management and reduce ER visits for exacerbation of the disease; and an emergency department COPD care pathway including greater province-wide access to spirometry testing and interpretation.

Ontario Nurses' Association – ONA hopes to see the Ontario Budget allocate funding for new policies to support the 95% of the nursing workforce delivering care to patients under increasingly unsafe circumstances, while continuing to fund ongoing policies that support 5% of the workforce, such as the new nursing graduate guarantee and the establishment of nurse practitioner-led clinics. We expect funding for policies that restore eliminated nursing positions, particularly in the hospital sector, and focus on retention initiatives, such as funding for late-career and mid-career nursing initiatives. ONA urges the government to adopt a policy of retaining full-time equivalent nursing positions (including current nursing vacancies) employed in hospitals while taking steps to create the promised 9,000 net new nursing positions before 2011-2012.

Residential & Civil Construction Alliance – This labour-management construction alliance continues to advocate extended infrastructure investment but wishes to see a more streamlined EA process for basic infrastructure projects. RCCAO's latest report – *Are Ontario's Municipal Class Environmental Assessments Worth the Added Time and Costs?* – estimates that reducing duplicative processes would save Ontario taxpayers \$232M/year. Moving ahead with these municipal infrastructure projects would also spur the creation of 10,000 full-time equivalent jobs annually. RCCAO is also calling for creation of a Municipal Class EA Regulation, similar to the Transit EA introduced in 2008, to fast-track basic infrastructure projects. For instance, Schedule B or C projects (in Municipal Class EA parlance) of a certain value could be fast-tracked if these projects have already gone through a public consultation process under the Planning Act, Places to Grow, Official Plan or municipal capital budgeting exercises. Such projects might include road widening and streetscaping improvements, water/wastewater upgrades or bridge replacements. Efforts have already been taken between Queen's Park and Ottawa to reduce unnecessary EA duplication but more could be done in this regard. For example, valuable time could be saved by establishing protocols with federal agencies in relation to bridge replacement EAs as to which organization has the final say on clearance distances between the structure and navigable waters. Rather than suggesting a particular quantum for infrastructure funding, we propose changes as a way to stretch limited but vital investment in infrastructure projects.

Social Planning Toronto – Social Planning Toronto would be relieved to see the Province continue to live up to their previous commitments toward poverty reduction, in particular such important (but relatively small-ticket) items as the commitment to hiring additional employment standards enforcement officers (\$10M committed, \$5M in last year's budget), and maintaining the level of funding for childcare, despite the 'last gasp' of federal funding.

STUDIOUS BUDGET SIMULATION

UofT management prof Sanford Borins developed a budget simulation in which his public management students, representing the major Ontario government ministries as well as a privatization secretariat, were tasked to produce a \$3B government-wide base spending cut as an element of the upcoming budget. Go to www.sandfordborins.com/courses/mgtc42h-publicmanagement/

Students' major decisions included selling a minority interest in the LCBO to raise \$ 1.5B, funding cuts for LHINs and eHealth but not OHIP, and integrating the public and Catholic school systems to produce savings, starting with school buses.

Borins noted that in two short weeks the students brought themselves up to speed about the Estimates and a wide range of government programs and managed a cabinet discussion that was knowledgeable, collegial, and effective. This simulation could have been gamed by 'Musical Ride' proposals, turf protection, and evasiveness; in fact, it was characterized by willingness to contribute to a painful but necessary shared goal.

BITS & PIECES

"BREAKFASTING PUBLICLY" – That's an *IQP* spy's report on the Feb 22 meeting in Accents of federal minister John Baird and TTC chair Adam Giambrone.