

June 17, 2014

Liberal majority win provides stability: industry

KELLY LAPOINTE

staff writer



Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals' majority win on June 12 provides a political landscape full of opportunities for key construction industry priorities, say construction leaders.

"A majority government gives stability and allows the new government to put forward its priorities with a large degree of certainty," said David Frame, [Ontario General Contractors Association](#) director of government relations.

"Big picture, we can work on some of the big things that we've already been working with the government on, like infrastructure priorities and commitments that have been made for review of the Construction Lien Act including prompt payment.

Related:

[Long-term, dedicated funding a top priority for industry](#)

[Liberals provide answers to Ontario construction concerns](#)

[OCOT and prompt payment on industry's wishlist](#)

[Prompt payment key election issue in GTHA](#)

"There's big opportunities there, we expect to see some significant movement on those in particular."

In what many see as a surprise, Wynne won 59 of Ontario's 107 seats with the Progressive Conservatives garnering 27 and the NDP 21.

The Liberals had been in a minority situation since the 2011 election, with the NDP propping them up. The NDP triggered the election when they did not support the May 1 budget, which many viewed as an "NDP-style" document.

Now, the Liberals will re-table that budget within 20 days.

In the budget, the Liberals promised a total of \$29 billion in transportation infrastructure. It is estimated that the province faces a \$60-billion infrastructure deficit that continues to grow. The Liberals' plan includes \$15 billion in transit projects in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), including the electrification of GO Transit commuter trains and a downtown Toronto subway relief line.

The other \$14 billion would be spent on roads, bridges, highways and other transit projects outside of the GTHA. This includes \$1 billion to support the development of the Ring of Fire in the north, with or without financial help from the federal government.

"I think the real positive thing for business is that transit will improve the productivity equation in the province without having to do what some parties wanted to do and that was to cut, cut, cut," said Patrick Dillon, business manager [Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario](#).

"They have made very important commitments to infrastructure and particularly transit and that's a huge area for us. It's important that agenda has now been set and we can move forward with it," said Frame.

The OGCA is also looking forward to working with the government on issues surrounding occupational health

and safety, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) and skills development and training, among others.

Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) executive director Andy Manahan hopes to see Wynne implement new revenue tools to fund transit and transportation infrastructure.

"We all know that Wynne was talking quite confidently last year about implementing new revenue tools to pay for transit and so forth. She had to back down because of the minority government and the opposition parties not supporting her," he said.

"It's a good opportunity now with a majority government to make a move on new revenue tools, whatever those tools might be."

Manahan added that he hopes to see a fresh take on revenue tools than the ones presented in the May 1 budget.

The [Ontario College of Trades](#) (OCOT) was a contentious issue throughout the election campaign with the PCs promising to abolish it if elected. Wynne committed to a special advisory review of the college.

"I'm quite pleased that the College of Trades won't be abolished," said Dillon.

He added that he looks forward to sitting down with business, labour and training stakeholders and the government to discuss what issues need to be fixed, such as compulsory certification reviews.

"We've had one of those decisions made recently and I think the college got the right decision, however it did expose that we're not really prepared policy-wise for the transition. There's also overlap between trades and the college has to have a mechanism as to how you deal with that overlap so that we can all work together and be supportive of the college as we go forward."

[Progressive Contractors Association](#) vice-president, federal and Ontario, Sean Reid said his organization's concerns have not changed, including those around OCOT and fair and open tendering.

"There's no question that we will continue to bring our concerns about the college to the attention of the government. Exactly how we're going to do that is something that we'll be discussing in greater detail over the coming days."

In the budget, Wynne committed to increasing the number of apprentices training in the province.

"Promoting apprenticeship is something that PCA supports, but our view of how that gets done starts with removing the barriers that we believe impede more young people from joining the trades," said Reid.

"That's what we're going to continue to give voice to as we move forward. We have a system that's putting up more barriers to the skilled trades than it is bringing down right now and that needs to change."

Dillon agreed that increasing apprenticeships is important.

"I'd like to get some money to do some measurement around it and see what is the training capacity for training the future trades workforce for the province of Ontario."

The [Ontario Home Builders Association](#) (OHBA) said it looks forward to working with the Liberal Party as they have built a strong relationship with them.

"The provincial government needs to create a more business-friendly environment to support economic

growth,” said Joe Vaccaro, chief executive officer of OHBA, in a statement. “We continue to work on ensuring the effective implementation of the growth plan through the creation of investment-ready communities, improving the apprenticeship system and tackling the underground economy by supporting the government’s commitment to combat illegal building. OHBA looks forward to working with the government and Premier Wynne to improve housing affordability and support job creation.”

The budget estimated the provincial deficit to be \$12.5 billion in 2014-15, an increase from \$11.3 billion in 2013. It projected the deficit would fall to \$8.9 billion in 2015-16 and \$5.3 billion in 2016-17, then achieve a balance or surplus in 2017-18.