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Is a slimmer Ontario cabinet better?

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Many industry stakeholders expected Premier Dalton McGuinty's slimmer 22-member cabinet, but the shift in positions and creation of dual ministries might not have been.

Among the major changes is [former infrastructure minister Bob Chiarelli, now in charge of the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of Transportation](#). Construction industry stakeholders viewed it as a big step forward when infrastructure became its own ministry because they felt the state of infrastructure slipped when it was paired with energy in 2008.

"We found infrastructure tended to be treated as the junior portfolio," said David Frame, Director of Government Relations and Corporate Strategy with the Ontario General Contractors Association.

He added that likely won't happen with Chiarelli and that the two ministries are a logical combination.

■ [Minority provincial government could move slowly: Council of Ontario Construction Associations](#)

"Probably most of the issues around transportation relate to the infrastructure and maintaining the infrastructure or expanding the infrastructure so I think those will work."

Going forward, there's a lot to discuss concerning the 10-year plan, Infrastructure Ontario's Alternative Financing and Procurement (AFP) and project bundling, said Andy Manahan. **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario** executive director.

"I think there's definitely a synergy there because Infrastructure Ontario has pushed towards that type of approach and MTO now is recognizing that AFP model is going to be used. Bundling in terms of asset management is going to be important."

■ [Ontario outlines 10-year infrastructure spending plan](#)

Because Ontario is in a deficit situation and the province is the largest purchaser of infrastructure, Manahan said "we're going to have to highlight that whatever proposals we have will either have very minimal cost [or be cost neutral]. This is the non-infrastructure spend issue, which is why the AFP model will be so important."

Ian Cunningham, President of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations, said it'll be a big job, but with Chiarelli's many years in politics will serve him well. He is waiting to hear how Infrastructure Ontario will roll out its projects.

"Refocusing to core economic infrastructure, at a time when job creation and getting the economy kick-started is the highest priority, is important" he said.

Linda Jeffrey will take over as Minister of Labour and Minister Responsible for Seniors. Cunningham said she will have her hands full.

“At labour, we’re at a very critical juncture in both occupational health and safety reform and the funding model at the WSIB,” he said. “I know she’s a very, very capable person. She seems to have an interest in health and safety from the sprinkler campaign in multi-res buildings, a private members bill that she advanced.”

Frame is anticipating the Arthur’s Review of WSIB funding to surface in the next few weeks.

“That will kick-start a lot of discussion around those [WSIB] recommendations, I’m sure. I’m confident the minister will give the report a lot of attention,” he said.

Karen Renkema, Ontario Road Builders’ Association (ORBA) Director of Government Relations, said there are a number of changes coming very quickly to the Ministry of Labour now that a Chief Prevention Officer has been appointed.

“We hope that much more information is shared with the industry is involved with the decisions that are made moving forward.”

Since construction has been the main focus of the [Tony Dean occupational health and safety report](#), Renkema hopes “that construction continues to have a very constructive conversation with the ministry from both the employer and the employee standpoint.”

With the recent release of the Ontario College of Trades Board of Governors and Divisional Boards, Renkema said she is looking forward to discussing the college with new Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities Glenn Murray.

She said Jim Bradley, appointed to the environment ministry, is a capable minister with lots of background in the portfolio, though there have been a great number of new issues that have passed that environment portfolio since he was last there.

Some of the nagging environmental issues for ORBA are permits to take water and construction excess materials.

Despite having a smaller cabinet and many ministers doubling up on portfolios, there are some positives to be taken from the new cabinet.

“Larger cabinets are tougher to make decisions, tougher to move things forward with so I think we’re going to get faster decision making with a smaller cabinet, that’s good,” concluded Frame.