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What's Inside

Office of the Employer Reports Two
Important Changes at the WSIB

Premier Ford Signals Strong Mayor
Legislation for Toronto and Ottawa

FAO Reports on Government of Ontario
Spending in Fiscal 2021 – 2022

Star's Robert Benzie Tweets About Possible
PC Committee Chairs

Antigen Screening Program Extended
NDP Shadow Cabinet

OFFICE OF THE EMPLOYER REPORTS TWO IMPORTANT CHANGES AT THE WSIB

Our friends at the Office of the Employer Advisor (OEA) reported the following two important changes in respect of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board:

- COVID-19 claim costs for claims with accident dates on or after July 1, 2022, will now be applied in the calculation of a Schedule 1 employer's individual premium rate. Costs associated with COVID-19 claims with accident dates on or before June 30, 2022, will continue to be allocated across Schedule 1. This change follows a similar shift for Schedule 2 employers which took effect earlier this year. This update is noted on the [WSIB web site within the Covid-19 FAQs for business accounts](#).
- The WSIB will stop providing statements of account, premium rate statements, and claim detail statements in paper format starting in January 2023. [Employers will need sign up for the WSIB's online services](#) to access their statements electronically. The WSIB's news release regarding this change can be found here: [We're eliminating paper statements](#).

PREMIER FORD SIGNALS STRONG MAYOR LEGISLATION FOR TORONTO AND OTTAWA

Recent media reports indicate that Ontario's PC government plans to reform the City of Toronto Act and the City of Ottawa Act to provide the mayors of those cities with significantly increased authorities likened to the strong mayors' powers in many US cities. Premier Ford has stated that by giving the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa additional powers, things will get done faster and the provincial government will be better positioned to achieve its new housing target of 1.5 million new homes in ten years. Although no legislation has been introduced to amend the two statutes (it could be proposed in the upcoming Throne Speech and budget when the 43rd Parliament begins on August 8th) rumors include the following:

- That amendments to the City of Toronto Act and the City of Ottawa Act will be passed into law in advance of the upcoming municipal elections
- That the amendments will give the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa veto power over the decisions of their councils
- That a two-thirds vote of council could override a mayoral veto
- That Toronto and Ottawa could be a pilot for the strong mayor system of local government and if it proves to be successful, similar amendments could be made to the statutes that address how other local governments are governed

A number of Toronto city councilors have objected saying that the strong mayor system erodes democracy.

FAO REPORTS ON GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO SPENDING IN FISCAL 2021 – 2022

Here are the highlights copied from the Financial Accountability Office's report on the Government of Ontario's spending in the fiscal year 2021 – 2022 that was published on July 19, 2022.

Changes to the 2021-22 Spending Plan

The Province started the 2021-22 fiscal year with a spending plan of \$178.3 billion.[1] By the end of the fiscal year, the spending plan had increased by \$6.8 billion to \$185.1 billion. Key fourth quarter changes include:

- The health sector spending plan increased by \$4.0 billion, primarily for the Operation of Hospitals (\$3.0 billion increase), the Long-Term Care Homes Program (\$0.5 billion increase), and Population and Public Health (\$0.4 billion increase).
- The 'other programs' sector received a \$1.1 billion spending plan increase in the fourth quarter, including liability adjustments for solid waste landfills and contaminated mine sites (\$0.4 billion increase) and for the Ontario Small Business Relief Grant (\$0.3 billion increase).
- The children's and social services sector spending plan decreased by \$0.7 billion, due to a decrease in planned spending for Ontario Works (-\$0.4 billion decrease), the Ontario Disability Support Program (-\$0.2 billion decrease) and the Ontario Drug Benefit Plan (-\$0.1 billion decrease).

2021-22 Spending (Unaudited)

Although the Province increased its 2021-22 spending plan during the year by \$6.8 billion to \$185.1 billion, by the end of 2021-22 unaudited spending was only \$177.9 billion. Overall, this was \$7.2 billion (3.9 per cent) less than planned.

- All sectors spent less than planned, led by 'other programs' (\$2.4 billion or 7.2 per cent under plan), health (\$1.8 billion or 2.4 per cent under plan) and interest on debt (\$0.6 billion or 5.0 per cent under plan). Also, an unspent \$1.8 billion end-of-year balance remained in the Contingency Fund.
- Spending information for all of the Province's programs by ministry is available on the FAO's website at: <https://tinyurl.com/3tfejdp5>.

Compared to the previous year (2020-21), unaudited spending in 2021-22 was down \$0.8 billion (0.4 per cent).

- Health (\$4.3 billion), interest on debt (\$0.5 billion) and justice (\$0.2 billion) all spent more in 2021-22 compared to 2020-21. Health spending was up, year-over-year, largely due to higher COVID-19-related spending and higher spending on payments to physicians.
- 'Other programs' (-\$4.4 billion), education (-\$0.9 billion) and children's and social services (-\$0.5 billion) all spent less in 2021-22 compared to 2020-21. Spending on 'other programs' and education was down year-over-year, largely due to lower net spending on COVID-19-related programs.

2021-22 Budget Deficit Projection

The FAO projects the 2021-22 budget deficit will be \$8.1 billion. This is an improvement of \$5.4 billion compared to the Province's 2021-22 budget deficit projection of \$13.5 billion in the 2022 Ontario Budget, presented on April 28, 2022.

- The FAO estimates that 2021-22 total revenue will be \$1.6 billion higher and total spending will be \$3.8 billion lower than forecast by the Province in the 2022 budget.

Status of Unallocated Funds

The Province started the 2021-22 fiscal year with \$2.1 billion in unallocated funds in the Contingency Fund. In the third quarter, the Province created the Time-Limited COVID-19 Fund, with a balance of \$2.7 billion, and topped up the Contingency Fund by \$0.3 billion, for total available unallocated funds of \$5.1 billion. After accounting for net transfers to various programs during the year of \$3.3 billion, the remaining balances at the end of 2021-22 were \$1.8 billion in the Contingency Fund and zero in the Time-Limited COVID-19 Fund.

The FAO's full report is available at the following link:

<https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/2021-22-expenditure-monitor-q4>

STAR'S ROBERT BENZIE TWEETS ABOUT POSSIBLE PC COMMITTEE CHAIRS

The Toronto Star's Queen's Park Bureau Chief Robert Benzie tweeted about possible Tory picks for Legislative Standing Committee Chairs. Without divulging his sources, Benzie speculates the following:

- Donna Skelly, deputy speaker and chair of committee of the whole
- Ernie Hardeman, finance
- Lorne Coe, justice
- Goldie Ghamari, social policy
- Laurie Scott, infrastructure, heritage, culture
- Aris Babikian, interior
- Will Bouma, government agencies

Missing among all the government appointees is the MPP for Nepean and former cabinet minister, Lisa McLeod, who is rumoured to have been difficult to

work with in caucus and on the "outs" with Premier Ford.

Also missing is Nina Tangri (insurance broker and long-time politician wannabe who was first elected to public office on her 6th attempt in 2016, appointed Associate Minister for Red Tape Reduction in June 2021) who is the Premier's pick for the Speaker's chair. Tangri will be facing off against the popular, far more experienced and fair-minded Ted Arnott (first elected in 1990, in government he served as PA in a number of portfolios, in opposition served in several critic roles, served as Speaker in the last Parliament and is considered an expert in procedure).

All appointments (minister, parliamentary assistant, committees chair and committee member) come with a bump in compensation.

ANTIGEN SCREENING PROGRAM EXTENDED

We have been advised by the Ministry of Labour Immigration Training and Skills Development that the Provincial Antigen Screening Program (PASP) is being extended until December 31, 2022. According to the notice received from the Ministry, this program extension will ensure continued access to rapid antigen tests (RATs) for all workplaces that are open and require staff to be onsite as we move into the fall and beyond. Workplaces can continue to order RATs through regular distribution channels. The Ministry expressed its thanks for your ongoing collaboration and partnership, which contributes to workplace health and safety. Thank you, Rapid Antigen Team, Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development

NDP SHADOW CABINET

As previously reported, Peter Tabuns, the MPP for Toronto -Danforth who was first elected to the Ontario legislature in 2006, was elected as the NDP's Interim Party Leader. The NDP, which forms the Official Opposition in the legislature recently appointed its caucus management and legislative critics. All 31 NDP MPPs were appointed to these various positions. The critic positions match up with public policy issues rather than ministries. They are as follows:

- Jill Andrew — women's social and economic opportunity, culture and heritage
- Teresa Armstrong — affordability and pensions
- Doly Begum — immigration services and international credentials and deputy leader
- Jessica Bell — housing
- Guy Bourgoquin — Francophone affairs and forestry
- Jeff Burch — municipal affairs and caucus chair
- Catherine Fife — finance and the Treasury Board
- Jennifer French — transportation (highways) and Infrastructure
- Wayne Gates — long-term care, retirement homes and home care
- France Gelinias — health
- Chris Glover — small business, tech development and innovation
- Lisa Gretzky — mental health and addictions and deputy house leader
- Joel Harden — transportation (transit and active transportation)
- Andrea Horwath — ethics and accountability
- Bhutila Karpoche — child care, early childhood development and GTA issues
- Terence Kernaghan — economic development, job creation and trade

- Laura Mae Lindo — colleges and universities, anti-racism and equity
- Sol Mamakwa — Indigenous and treaty relations and northern development and deputy leader
- Michael Mantha — natural resources, mines and Ring of Fire and deputy whip
- Chandra Pasma — poverty and homelessness reduction
- Tom Rakocevic — consumer protection and auto insurance
- Peggy Sattler — democratic reform and house leader
- Sandy Shaw — environment, conservation and parks
- Jennie Stevens — sports, tourism, veterans, legion and military affairs
- Marit Stiles — education
- Peter Tabuns — intergovernmental affairs, energy and the climate crisis and interim party leader
- Monique Taylor — children, community and social services and deputy whip
- John Vanthof — agriculture, food and rural affairs, solicitor general and chief whip
- Lise Vaugeois — seniors, persons living with disabilities and accessibility
- Jamie West — labour, training and skills development
- Kristyn Wong-Tam — attorney general, 2SLGBTQ+ issues

Andrea Horwath recently confirmed the long-suspected rumour that she will be running for mayor of Hamilton. It's not known however when she will resign her seat in the Ontario legislature.