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Ontario Takes Next Step To Facilitate Free Trade Within Canada

Stakeholder input regarding a draft regulation under the Ontario Free Trade and Mobility Act (OFTMA) and feedback to inform the operationalization of mutual recognition in Ontario and identify key risks, implementation concerns and possible mitigations for consideration, is currently being solicited on the Regulatory Registry.

This is part of the provincial government's expedited initiative to build a stronger, more competitive and resilient economy by facilitating free trade among Canadian jurisdictions.

"Under OFTMA, mutual recognition for goods means that an out-of-province good that has met the applicable standards and received the applicable approvals relating to the composition, performance, production, manufacture, quality, marketing, labelling, testing, certification, inspection or use of the good in its home jurisdiction would be treated as if it has met the "corresponding standards" and received the "corresponding approvals" in Ontario. Once the good has entered Ontario, it would be subject to Ontario's rules on the sale or use of that good."

Here is the government news release:

<https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1006862/ontario-taking-next-steps-to-unlock-free-trade-within-canada>

Here's a link to the Regulatory Registry:

https://www.regulatoryregistry.gov.on.ca/proposal/52913?utm_campaign=%2Fen%2Frelease%2F1006862%2Fontario-taking-next-steps-to-unlock-free-trade-within-canada&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsroom

Province and Feds Agree To Eliminate Duplication and Open the Ring of Fire

An Ontario government news release dated December 18, 2025 announcing the signing of an agreement with the federal government opened with the following statement,

"Ontario and Canada have signed a historic cooperation agreement that will significantly streamline environmental approvals for major infrastructure and resource projects through a new 'one project, one process, one decision' model that is now in effect. The agreement will remove duplicative and overlapping federal impact assessments from Ontario's world-leading environmental assessment process to build infrastructure faster and unlock resource development across the province, helping to build a more competitive, resilient and self-reliant Canadian economy.

[Click here for the Ontario government's news release](#) and [here for the full text of the agreement.](#)

Integrity Commissioner To Investigate Alleged SDF Ethic Breach

Much has been written about the Skills Development Fund (SDF) in previous issues of COCA's monthly GR Reports and Newsletters so there is no need to recount the alleged mismanagement of the \$2.5 billion fund here.

However, after requests from both the NDP and Liberals, Ontario's Integrity Commissioner has decided to initiate an investigation into the handling of the SDF by the Minister of Labour Immigration Training and Skills Development. The complaint made by the Liberals is more narrowly defined than the much broader NDP objection and it is not known if the integrity Commissioner will investigate one or both. The process is expected to take about 8 months.

Here are our thoughts:

- With so many trades people approaching retirement, Ontario is facing a significant shortage of skilled trades workers in the coming years
- The government has to do something to attract new entrants to careers in the skilled trades, well beyond the normal levels, if its growth objectives are to be met and our quality of life maintained
- The SDF is a massively huge \$2.5 billion fund designed to attract new entrants into skilled trades careers; with a fund so large, mistakes are inevitable
- It's reasonable to assume that the government either helped develop or at least signed-off on the criteria/decision guide for selecting successful applicants
- However, the government always has the proper authority to override public servants and make decisions that it believes are in the best interests of Ontarians
- Governments of all stripes tend to favour their own friends and supporters when all things are close to being equal
- The SDF has funded more than 1,000 programs that have introduced hundreds of thousands of job seekers in very meaningful ways to the skilled trades, a significant number in construction and a large portion from underrepresented and less advantaged groups
- All of the excellent work and the successful programs funded by the SDF have been tarred negatively by the handful of mistakes that were made that have drawn so much media attention

Now it's up to the Integrity Commissioner to investigate the behaviours of Minister Piccini and determine if he has acted in a way that is contrary to the Members Integrity Act.

Legislature's Winter Break Extended

The Ontario Legislature rose for its winter break on Thursday, December 11, 2025.

The legislature was originally scheduled to reconvene in mid February; however, the government extended the break and MPPs will not return to the Pink Palace until March 23, 2026.

The government gets full marks for advancing its agenda. About a dozen Government Bills were passed into law in 2025 despite the legislature sitting for only 51 days. Much of this legislation was fast-tracked, circumventing the usual law making processes.

The winter break is the perfect time for construction association representatives to meet with their MPPs to discuss the challenges that the industry faces both locally and provincially. On the provincial front, these challenges include:

- reforming our workers compensation system
- advancing occupational health and safety
- addressing the unnecessary complications of the province's training system
- rolling out more public infrastructure projects

Your efforts advocating for these issues with your local MPPs is a tremendous help as COCA presses for the same agenda at Queen's Park.

Ontario and New York State Agree to Work Together on Nuclear Power

The governments of Ontario and New York State have agreed to work together to advance the development of affordable, reliable and clean nuclear power. The following has been copied directly from the Ontario government's news release.

"Building on this expertise (note: Ontario's deep expertise in nuclear) Ontario will work closely with New York State to share its expertise in selecting nuclear sites and technologies, project development, management and operations and supply chain development for new nuclear builds."

"Under the agreement, Ontario and New York State will work to:

- Share expertise in the development and deployment of advanced nuclear technology
- Educate the public about the economic and environmental benefits of advanced nuclear technology
- Explore opportunities to expand the trade of electricity between Ontario and New York
- Collaborate on initiatives to strengthen the nuclear workforce and identify opportunities for joint OPG-NYPA projects that create jobs in both jurisdictions."

The full text of the government's news release can be found here:

<https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1006888/ontario-and-new-york-sign-agreement-to-build-nuclear-energy-and-grow-economies>