

COMMENT

Then and Now



Above left, The powerhouse on Willow St. in Acton. The date stone above the door records the 1899 advent of electricity in Acton. The chimney became part of Baxter Laboratories after Hurricane Hazel destroyed the dam. The only detail that appears to remain is the chimney, as seen in the Now photo.

Ontario Archives 9339 No. 1F. Provenance: John McDonald/Photo by Amy Douglas, Heritage Halton Hills

From our readers



IS THIS A JOKE?

Simone Garland sent in this photo taken March 25 of a rather confused bird that is not sure what to make of our recent weather.

Ontario debt critical

Last month in this space, I reported on the 2016-17 provincial budget, which was presented to the Ontario Legislature on Feb. 25.

I wrote about the massive provincial debt, now grown to \$308 billion.

To place this number in context, Ontario's debt stood at \$139 billion in 2003, when the Ontario Liberals took office. Under the McGuinty and Wynne governments, the debt has more than doubled in 13 years.

Ontario is now carrying the heavy burden of the largest sub-national debt in the world. With interest costs of \$12 billion a year, servicing the debt is the third largest line-item in the budget after health and education.

As is so often the case, in the weeks following the budget presentation, additional details came to light that the government had hoped to downplay.

Under the heading Sustaining the Ontario Drug Benefit Program in the Budget Papers, the government outlined its intention to make seniors pay substantially more for their prescriptions.

It was announced that as of Aug. 1, the income threshold for single seniors to qualify for the low-income seniors benefit would go from \$16,018 to \$19,300.

For senior couples, the eligibility income threshold would go from \$24,175 to \$32,300.

Seniors whose incomes are above these thresholds would pay more for medications: in percentage terms, much, much more.

Again commencing this August, the budget proposed that the annual deductible under the Ontario Drug Benefit program would be increased from \$100 to \$170 and the co-payment per prescription would be increased from

\$6.11 to \$7.11.

Our Ontario PC Caucus objected in the strongest possible terms to these increases in the cost of seniors prescriptions.

We said it is unfair and unacceptable that seniors would be forced to pay so much more for the medicines they need, when billions of taxpayers dollars have been wasted due to inadequate oversight of programs and the misguided priorities of this government.

On April 4, the Canadian Press reported that the government is backtracking on these changes. We will be closely reviewing their latest

proposal, but it seems our arguments in support of seniors may have won the day.

But another very troubling fact has emerged in recent weeks.

The government virtually ignored the pre-budget consultations of the Legislature's Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. This all-Party committee of MPPs held public hearings in January.

The government showed its complete disregard for the views of every single person who made a presentation, by preparing and presenting the budget before the Committee had even finished its report to the House.

And now we learn of the latest controversy, where the Liberal fundraising machine has been shown to have blatantly sold access to the Premier and Ministers to key stakeholders, promising them an inside track on the government's decisions.

Then it all comes together, with a pungent smell of scandal that seems to follow this government wherever it goes.

Ted Arnott is the MPP for Wellington-Halton Hills



TED ARNOTT

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