

More Work to Be Done at Queen's Park

By Sylvia Jones, MPP

Dufferin-Caledon

December 8 marked the end of the fall session at the Ontario Legislature.

A lot has happened over the course of four months, including a throne speech, as well as two independent officers of the Legislature - the Auditor General and the Financial Accountability Officer - tabled their annual reports.

The fall session began with a prorogation of the Legislature and a throne speech to allow the government to hit restart on their agenda after the government lost a Liberal stronghold in Scarborough Rouge River.

As part of the throne speech, the government announced the removal of the provincial portion of the HST on hydro bills. Unfortunately it's too little, too late - Ontarians and businesses have been paying exorbitant hydro prices for the thirteen years under this government's watch.

The rising price of hydro is the number one issue I hear from individuals and businesses in Dufferin-Caledon, and I've repeatedly shared their concerns at the Legislature. I will continue to fight for a real a real plan to make the cost of hydro affordable once again, including stopping the sell-off of Hydro One.

On November 14, the government presented their fall update on the province's economy and continued to claim they are on target to eliminate the province's deficit by 2017/18. However, Ontario's independent officer of the Legislature - the Financial Accountability Officer (FAO) - disagreed with the government's assessment of Ontario's finances.

Rather than eliminating the deficit, the FAO argued that unless there is a reduction in spending, or the government finds new ways to raise revenue, the province will continue to run a deficit until 2020/21.

The FAO also predicted that Ontario's debt will rise to a record total of \$370 billion by 2020/21. It's clear the government has no real plan to balance the budget or tackle our province's rising debt crisis.

Just before the end of the fall session Ontario's Auditor General (AG) released her fourth annual report, highlighting many issues with the government's fiscal management in areas, including: infrastructure, health care services, and the environment. The report noted the government's willingness to give out second and third contracts to contractors that provided substandard work, including installing parts of bridges upside down or using substandard asphalt for our roads.

The Auditor also raised concerns with the government's cap-and-trade scheme that will not substantially lower emissions and will cost Ontarians and businesses approximately \$8 billion from 2017 to 2020. Another issue the report found was the unacceptable wait times for care in our province's hospitals.

Ontario's patients continue to pay the price for this government's cuts and years of frozen hospital budgets.

This year's report continues to show that life is harder under this government's watch.

The fall session also brought some successes. Most notably, with the help of concerned citizens and municipalities, we were able to get the Ontario Trillium Foundation to back off from reducing local representation.

I was also pleased to see the Niagara Escarpment Commission to abandon its plan to expand the boundaries of the Niagara Escarpment Plan.

Finally, I continue my advocacy for safety on Highway 10 by arranging a meeting between the Minister of Transportation and the Town of Mono.

It was a busy fall legislative session, at Queen's Park and 2017 shows no sign of being quieter. I will continue to raise the issues Dufferin-Caledon residents speak to me about regularly.