

THE BARRIE EXAMINER

PUBLISHER/GENERAL MANAGER: David Zilstra

EDITOR: Brian Rodnick

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705-726-6537

## comment

## McGuinty can't ignore the NDP

If Premier Dalton McGuinty forces NDP members to hold their noses and vote for March's budget without addressing leader Andrea Horwath's priorities, his government may well be shorter than the expected two years.

A snubbed left-wing party isn't pretty. The picture of what the minority Liberal government will do in its March budget, following the release of a report by economic adviser Don Drummond with recommendations on how to more efficiently deliver public services, is still murky, but some things are beginning to take shape.



Brian MacLeod

The Liberals will depend on the NDP to prop it up, at least for the coming budget. In separate interviews with QMI, NDP Leader Andrea Horwath and Progressive Conservative Leader Tim Hudak explained how they want to see things unfold.

The two are travelling the province in the absence of a legislative committee that would normally be holding pre-budget consultative meetings. Since the Liberals are in a minority, says Horwath, they should have a minority on the committee. But the three parties have been unable to agree on how to set up even the finance committee, so McGuinty is making speeches to warn — repeatedly — about spending restraints and relying on Drummond's frequent musings in the media, while Horwath and Hudak make pseudo-campaign stops throughout the province.

Horwath says she "won't draw lines in the sand" over what's coming in the budget, preferring to "wait and see what's on the table." Her priority is affordable living, which is addressed in part by removing the HST on home heating, a policy her party has in common with the PCs. She also wants more investment in home care and scheduled corporate tax cuts delayed to save \$2 billion in revenues — which she laments that Drummond is not empowered to consider. But she's not going to make demands to guarantee her party's support for the budget. Very magnanimous.

Hudak wants to see job creation measures without government investment, which includes corporate tax cuts, and major spending cuts to address the province's \$16-billion deficit, which all parties say must be eliminated by 2017/18. He also wants changes to the apprenticeship rules, which he says would create 200,000 skilled trades jobs, and a legislated two-year wage freeze on unionized public sector workers to bring them in line with non-union workers, whose salaries are already frozen.

McGuinty has rejected Hudak's suggestions, at least, in the way the PC leader wants them done. The premier will rely on the goodwill he's built up with unions to control wages and he's leaving changes to the apprenticeship rules to an industry committee. He will, however, make major spending cuts to address the deficit.

McGuinty has been consistent in his message that the deficit must be addressed in a substantial manner.

Hudak did not say his policies are requirements for his support of the budget, but his party's approval is looking tenuous.

That leaves the NDP to either support the budget or abstain. But if there is no tip of the hat to NDP priorities in the budget, Horwath will look weak. In a minority, it's expected that the party holding the balance of power is able to influence policy to some extent.

Horwath and Hudak are frustrated about what they say is McGuinty's decision to govern as though he has a majority.

The last person to do that was then prime minister Joe Clark, who led a Progressive Conservative government in 1979-80.

It lasted nine months.

brian.macleod@sunmedia.ca



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## ■ our opinion

## Ottawa must pay tab for 'tougher on crime' laws

It's one thing for the federal government to pass a new crime bill for Canadians.

It's quite another to make the provinces pay for it.

Ontario Correctional Services Minister Madeleine Meilleur says the federal omnibus crime bill will cost provincial taxpayers more than \$1-billion in increased police and correctional service costs.

This province is already facing a \$16-billion deficit in its next fiscal year.

What makes Ottawa think it can handle another \$1 billion?

This isn't about whether Canadians want a new law which makes fundamental changes to our entire justice system.

Or whether Canadians want tougher sentences on child sexual predators, mandatory minimum sentences for those convicted of drug crimes, etc.

Or whether Canadians agree with building more prisons for the additional criminals the new system will catch.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservatives won a majority government in last spring's federal election, so they have the mandate for Bill C-10; it received third reading late last year in Parliament and is awaiting Senate approval.

Harper said he was going to

get tougher on criminals — even though the crime rate right across Canada has decreased — and now he's doing it.

But why does a federal law increase expenses for the provinces?

Meilleur says the cost of a new Ontario prison would be \$900 million, and that it would cost another \$60 million to operate it — annually.

And make no mistake that this province will need another prison if Bill C-10 becomes law, and there is no indication it won't, given that Harper has had plenty of time to stack the Senate with Conservatives.

Meilleur says there are about 8,500 inmates in Ontario correctional facilities now, which are at 95% capacity. She says the new law will mean some jails will be so over-crowded they could be operating at 150% capacity, and that more people will need to be placed on parole.

This will mean more work for parole officers, correctional staff and police officers, who will have to spend more time in court.

An argument can and has been made that Meilleur is just playing politics here, a Liberal complaining about a Conservative policy.

And there has already been some recent criticism of Ottawa funding provincial health care

programs; Harper has decided Ontario will get a 6% annual increase until 2017, then those increases will be tied to economic growth and inflation, with a 3% guaranteed minimum.

Ontario's Liberals have accused the feds of abandoning health care, even though it is administered and operated by the province.

The Conservatives say this is what the federal government can afford and that this money will come with no strings attached. The message is for the provinces to get a handle on health care spending because it can't keep increasing at levels well above inflation.

But another \$1 billion for Ontario taxpayers for a federal crime bill is also well above inflation.

Officials in Quebec and Newfoundland have told the *Canadian Press* the federal crime bill will overwhelm their already maxed-out court systems and create a costly influx of prisoners to provincial jails.

But several other provinces, including British Columbia, Alberta and New Brunswick, support the federal changes.

It is unfair, however, for federal laws to dramatically increase provincial expenses.

As Meilleur said, Ottawa also needs to pay the tab for being tougher on crime.

## Health-care system funding benefits us all

Whether it's the birth of a new born baby, medical help when facing an illness or urgent care during an emergency, we all rely on our hospitals, doctors, nurses and other key parts of our health care system.

We want it to be there for ourselves and our family when we need it most.

Patrick Brown  
PARLIAMENT HILL

I know how important a reliable health care system is for Canadians and for our community here in Barrie.

While the health care system in Canada is a provincial and territorial responsibility, the federal government assists each province and territory with transfer payments for health care.

Under the previous federal government in the 1990s, those transfer payments were dramatically slashed to divert funding and unfortunately all Canadians experienced the negative result of those actions firsthand.

In 2006, Canadians elected a new Conservative government. We rejected the former government's slash-and-burn approach to health care, instead choosing to value Canada's publicly funded, universally accessible health care system.

We have increased health care funding to record highs, from \$20 billion a year when we formed the government to nearly \$27 billion this year.

Building on that record, I am happy to report that our Conservative government recently announced we would continue increasing support for Canada's health care system with a long-term and growing investment.

Specifically, federal health care transfers will continue to grow each year at record high levels; for instance, from \$30 billion per year in 2013-14 to \$38 billion per year in 2018-19.

What's more, we have further committed that annual health transfers will continue to grow above the already record highs. This further growth will be sustainable as it will be in line with Canada's economy (as measured by 'nominal Gross Domestic Product'), which is estimated to be at a rate of more than 4% growth a year. However, to ensure predictability for the provinces, our Conservative government has guaranteed annual growth of 3% or more each year.

That means federal support for health care will keep growing every year beyond the record levels the federal government has already invested, and in a way that is both predictable and sustainable. This will help ensure Canada's health care system, including our doctors and nurses, will be there when you and your family need them.

Locally, I have always been very active in support of our hospital. My annual charity event for RVH, 'Hockey Night in Barrie', has raised over \$600,000 to date and building on that success, last year we launched the inaugural 'Barrie Waterfront Half Marathon' where \$25,000 was raised for the Cardiac Care Unit at RVH.

This year's race will take place on June 17 and Hockey Night in Barrie V will be held Aug. 16. I encourage you to learn more about these great charity events online at [barriehalfmarathon.com](http://barriehalfmarathon.com) and [hockeynightinbarrie.com](http://hockeynightinbarrie.com). Please help support our hospital.

Barrie residents should stop by my sixth annual Chilifest next Saturday, Feb. 4 at the Royal Canadian Legion at 410 St. Vincent St., starting at noon. Chilifest raises funds for the Bill Wilkins Scholarship Fund and this year, in recognition of World Cancer Day (Feb. 4), we are supporting the great work that Gilda's Club does locally. I hope to see you there.

I am also very happy to announce the launch of my free mobile apps where you can follow my activities and see how I am making a difference for you in Ottawa.

I am the first Canadian MP to utilize this technology and the response has been excellent so far! For more information, please visit my website at [www.servingbarrie.com](http://www.servingbarrie.com).

Patrick Brown is Barrie's MP.

## Second suites a gentle form of intensification

The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation insures mortgages so aspiring homeowners need a lower down payment. But the CMHC also keeps a finger on the pulse of the housing market in each community, both ownership and rental.

Their news for Barrie isn't good. Rental vacancy rates dropped to 1.7% in 2011 and are projected to be only 1.5% in 2012.

A healthy vacancy rate is 3%, providing a good choice in units for tenants and a secure market for landlords.

Two main consequences of low vacancy rates are higher rents and worse choice in units. People must settle for apartments which are too small, in the wrong part of town, or otherwise

Erich Jacoby-Hawkins  
ROOT ISSUES

substandard, yet pay more for them. Lousy or overpriced housing is one more stress for those families already struggling with higher electric and water bills and increasing gas prices or transit fares.

New rental housing isn't coming very fast, if at all. There are promises to include affordable housing in the mix in the new annexation lands, but those are still many years off.

Even once construction starts, higher density affordable units are usually the last to be built,

only after the developers have made the big money selling premium properties.

Intensification is great, but there is a dearth of affordable housing proposals for our existing urban areas. Any higher density proposal meets with zoning obstacles and neighbourhood opposition, and most apartment buildings that get approved are aimed at seniors. This leaves out the rest of the demographics.

One of the best and quickest solutions would be to increase the facility for second units (apartments in houses, or granny suites) in all existing neighbourhoods.

In fact, in recognition of this, the province is requiring municipalities to alter their official plans to allow for greater use of this housing mode, as part of the Strong Communities Through

Lousy or overpriced housing is one more stress for those families already struggling with higher electric and water bills and increasing gas prices or transit fares.

Affordable Housing Act.

Second suites are a gentle form of intensification. Requiring no new construction or infrastructure, they don't create a visible change in the neighbourhood.

Instead, they fill underutilized space in existing homes. Our houses have grown larger while average family size has shrunk, leaving a lot of half-empty homes that can easily be split and shared.

Second units make housing more affordable for tenants and owners. A young family buying a home can rent out part of it to help pay the mortgage. Seniors

and empty-nesters with an apartment get help with expenses, and someone to share yard work and snow shoveling duties. Aging or emptying residential areas are renewed as younger families move in. Having more residents improves the sense of community and security of the street.

In part two, I will address some myths behind common objections to second suites.

Erich Jacoby-Hawkins is a director of the Ontario School of Economic Science and Earthsharing Canada. Comment on Root Issues at [www.ErichtheGreen.ca](http://www.ErichtheGreen.ca).



quote of the day

The Spirit Catcher is an iconic symbol of the city, and I can't think of any reason to deny the Barrie Curling Club's use of this icon."

Mike Wehling, member of the Barrie Curling Club, on the club's failure to secure permission to use Barrie's lakefront landmark.