

THE BARRIE EXAMINER

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comment

Drummond's praises overlooked

There is a disconnect between the Ontario Liberals' election success and the withering criticism Premier Dalton McGuinty faced upon the release of economist Don Drummond's report last week.

In October, voters returned the Liberals to power for the third straight time, the first time that's happened since 1902. Yet, the howls of how imperilled we are would imply voters must be foolish.



Brian MacLeod

Lost in the numerous depictions of the bloodbath Ontario faces during the next few years, were successes pointed out by Drummond that match voters' priorities.

In the fall election, McGuinty spent much of the campaign trumpeting his successes in health care and education, and buttressing them with more money. His message worked. Despite a massive increase in spending over the Liberals' two terms in office — an average increase of 7% a year — McGuinty was able to convince voters he'd spent much of that money on their priorities.

More critical surgeries were being performed; the province was declared by the Cancer Quality Council of Ontario as one of the best places in the world to be treated for cancer. High school graduation rates increased and tens of thousands of post-secondary spots were created. Of the province's health-care system, Drummond wrote: "There is some evidence that, on important matters, Ontario has one of the best or even the best system within Canada."

Along the way, the Liberals have spent a lot of money. Program spending has increased by more than \$40 billion, taxes and revenues have increased and the province's total debt has increased to more than \$200 billion. Much of the debt increase came about as a result of the recession that hit Ontario's manufacturing sector hard.

Progressive Conservative Leader Tim Hudak likes to compare Ontario's path to that of Greece, which is receiving its second massive bailout from the European Union. Yet, says Drummond, "by current international standards, Ontario debt is still relatively small." And, says Drummond, "spending is neither out of control nor wildly excessive." Ontario, he says, "runs one of the lowest-cost provincial governments in Canada relative to its GDP and has done so for decades."

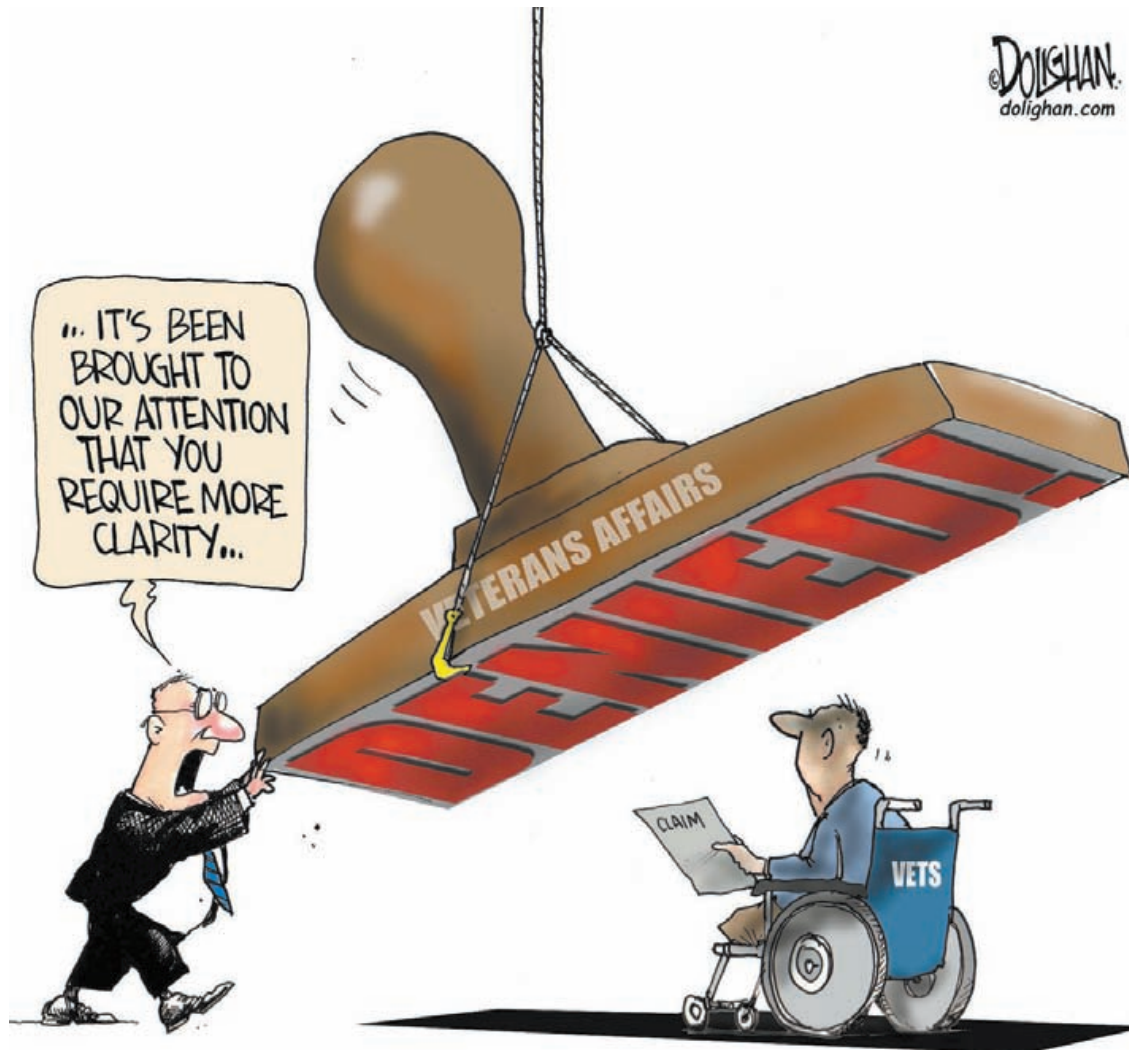
But the Liberals can no longer spend their way to electoral success. They'll have to balance spending cuts with what is almost certainly a slower path to eliminating the deficit than their target of 2017-18. The choices they have already made — refusing to eliminate all-day kindergarten or the 30% tuition grant — together with inevitable bumps in the road in transforming health care, means it likely will be closer to the Conference Board of Canada's estimate of 2020 before the deficit is eliminated.

Along the way, there are painful decisions to be made that could damage the Liberals at the local level. Will McGuinty, as Drummond recommends, close one of OLG's two headquarters in Sault Ste. Marie or Toronto, and one of two casinos in Niagara Falls? The Sault and Niagara Falls would lose hundreds of jobs.

And both are represented by Liberals. Will they charge user fees for school bus transportation? Northern ridings would rebel. The revenues are no longer there for the Liberals to govern the way they have in the past. They have shown they're capable of shepherding transformative change, but not of the massive nature Drummond is recommending, and not in the manner or the speed he says is necessary.

They'll have the term of this minority government to show they can transform the way they govern.

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The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow

Whether I am attending the opening of a new business, visiting local retirement homes or hosting annual events for charity, as your member of Parliament, I am always actively reaching out to as many people as possible.

Patrick Brown
PARLIAMENT HILL

I especially enjoy visiting local schools and interacting with our young people. I am constantly impressed with their level of knowledge and their amazing generosity towards the plight of others.

All across Ontario, young individuals are working hard to make a difference within their communities and around the world. The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow and they are proving they have what it takes by leaving a lasting impact on their communities and the future.

Last year, the 300-plus members of the Ontario Community Newspapers Association announced the 176 nominees for the 2011 Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year Awards. On Jan. 25 of this year, 12-year-old Mackenzie Oliver of Barrie found out she was one of the 12 final recipients of the award.

When Mackenzie was just seven years old, she found a Grade 3 student crying in the school washroom. The child was being bullied by other children. Kids had been teasing the girl about her weight. The little girl was trying to force herself to be ill, so Mackenzie comforted her and told her she was fine. There was nothing wrong with her. She was beautiful and she was loved.

Mackenzie went home that night and told her mom about the girl being bullied and how she wanted to reach out to others. Her mom suggested starting a group at school. So Mackenzie started her own organization and called it the 'I Love Me Club'.

Since 2007, Mackenzie has raised over \$35,000 for local charities. The charities she chooses to help primarily focus on the betterment of children, through peer and emotional support. Mackenzie recognizes the importance of self-esteem and speaks to different groups about the importance of feeling good about yourself and passing the feeling on to others.

Over the past few months, Mackenzie has been focusing her energy on raising \$6,000 to go to Kenya, where she wants to help finish building a school, to learn the Swahili language and learn about poverty-related issues in Africa.

Mackenzie and her mom, Ingrid, can often be seen around Barrie selling "I Love Me" T-shirts and blankets, hosting bake sales and holding 50/50 draws. This past Family Day weekend, Mackenzie hosted a bowling tournament where she raised \$1,800. Mackenzie is now only \$1,500 away from reaching her goal of travelling to the Dark Continent.

This young lady's energy and spirit is unparalleled. She has more fundraisers planned in the future and many more speaking engagements. But Mackenzie is also the consummate pragmatist when it comes to helping others. "I have to think bigger than bake sales if I'm going to raise even more money," she said recently.

I think everyone across our region will agree that Mackenzie Oliver embodies what it means to be a good friend, a caring citizen and a remarkable Canadian. She is a very worthy recipient of the prestigious award that she will receive at a ceremony held at Queen's Park next month.

If anyone is interested in helping Mackenzie to help others, or to learn more about the 'I Love Me Club', send an e-mail to ilovemeclub@live.ca, or give her a call at 705-735-2185.

You will be glad you did.

Patrick Brown is Barrie's MP.

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at blog.canoe.ca

pointofview

Gamble for Liberals lies in not doing enough

Tim Hudak and Don Drummond asked a lot of the same questions about Ontario's gambling monopoly.

The difference is Hudak is providing firm answers.

Taxpayers will be better off if the province sells the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., uses the proceeds to pay down debt and sticks to regulating and taxing gambling, not managing it, the Progressive Conservative leader says.

Hudak's position is ideological. As a conservative, he believes governments should leave business to businesses.

Drummond, an economist with long experience at the highest levels of both government and banking, is not so inclined to go with a gut feeling.

His massive review of Ontario government programs includes recommendations to make OLG more efficient and add to the \$2 billion it generates annually.

However, he is skeptical of claims that privatization is the better way.

"Current circumstances do not appear to offer a convincing value proposition for the province ... Before any sale is executed, there must be overwhelmingly clear evidence that Ontario would benefit from

such an arrangement in the long run," the report states.

Examine the benefits of a sale, Drummond says, but don't assume what you end up with will necessarily be better than what you have. And be aware that regulations necessary to protect the government's commitment to socially responsible gambling will reduce the attraction for investors.

On the other hand, some of the obvious measures he recommends to make OLG more profitable will be harder to carry out if the province is the owner. Two head offices, in Sault Ste. Marie and Toronto, are one too many. But the Sault office is a major employer in one of the few northern ridings the Liberals hold. Political considerations have likely kept the office open and will continue to come into play.

Ditto for the recommendation to close the older, smaller and less profitable of two casinos operating in Niagara Falls, in another Liberal riding.

The Liberals face tough decisions that come with much of Drummond's advice. They should explore selling OLG, but be prepared to hold on to it while taking his, and Hudak's, advice to run it more like a business.

— Jim Hendry

quote
of the day

It took me a lot of time to deal with what happened, and I'd like to move on from it now."

Const. Clayton Speers, one of two Barrie police officers up for prestigious awards for their bravery in the line of duty three years ago.

Barrie Central debate back in the crosshairs

Barrie Central Collegiate's future is news again, as the school board prepares capital priorities for the Ministry of Education.

A new Central is on the list, which is spun as a good news for Central supporters. Yet this request raises more questions than answers.

First, the timing. In some years, the ministry asks school boards to compile wish lists. This year, it has not. There is no pressing need for staff to draft a list, nor for trustees to approve and send it on.

So why go through this exercise now?

And what about the details? Funding is sought to build a new downtown high school for 400 students. If this strikes you as a shockingly low number,

Erich Jacoby-Hawkins
ROOT ISSUES

that's because it is.

Although the staff report claims this represents the outcome of the Accommodation Review Committee (ARC), no such number was ever presented at the ARC. It's less than half the current enrollment of 905, or even the projected 834 student population of 2021-22, to say nothing of the downtown growth the city and province expect (but the board staff dismiss).

Apparently it comes from subtracting everyone currently bused in or enrolled in the alter-

native programs that work best downtown.

This tiny figure originates from planning staff who earlier ruled out the future of a high school with fewer than the 1,200 to 1,400 students they arbitrarily declared optimal.

If today's numbers aren't big enough, how could only 400 be floated? I'm all for smaller schools, but this strains credulity.

From the start, staff resolved to close Central, while the community ARC was adamant that it be saved. Is it possible that, in the guise of following the ARC's recommendation for a rebuild, staff are actually trying to get Central's future rejected by the ministry, so they can resume their original path to closure?

Coincidentally, a name from the past has returned. When the

So why go through this exercise now? And what about the details? Funding is sought to build a new downtown high school for 400 students. If this strikes you as a shockingly low number, that's because it is.

Barrie high school ARC launched with bells tolling for Central's imminent closure and sale, the board's associate director was Carol McAulay. But she left the process about halfway through, moving on to new employment.

Meanwhile, a surge of Central support secured a reprieve. If Central had closed on the staff's proposed deadline of June 2012, for sale signs would be popping up any day now. Yet with Barrie's downtown struggling to fill leases and replace burnt-out buildings, who would buy a large

lot zoned for educational use?

It turns out Laurentian University is eager to own a piece of downtown Barrie for their planned satellite campus. And guess who's in charge of securing that property? Laurentian's new vice-president of administration, Carol McAulay.

I wonder if she had a spot in mind when she hired on?

Erich Jacoby-Hawkins is a director of the Ontario School of Economic Science and Earthsharing Canada. Comment on Root Issues at www.ErichtheGreen.ca.