

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Auditor General highlights Liberals? waste, mismanagement

Ontario's Auditor General released her largest annual report, with 1,079 pages in two volumes, Dec. 6. The report focuses on value-for-money audits, as well as measures for the government to improve its accountability. The Auditor General is an independent and non-partisan officer of the Legislative Assembly. The Auditor General raised concerns with the government's service delivery, program implementation and government's complex accounting practices. In all, the auditor identified more than a billion dollars of waste in 14 government programs. Under the government watch, nine energy companies billed ratepayers \$260 million in ineligible expenses, including raccoon traps and scuba gear. At a time when families are struggling to pay for their hydro, energy companies submitted inappropriate expenses which the government paid without confirming the expenses were valid. Despite this, the government is not serious about recovering the unpaid ineligible expenses. Their inactions leave ratepayers paying \$80 million in inappropriate expenses. Another major concern the Auditor General identified is that the government has spent \$17.4 million on partisan advertising. The auditor said that the primary goal of these ads was to "foster a positive impression of the governing party." These include a \$3-million infrastructure campaign which the auditor said was "self-congratulatory and aimed at ensuring the government gets credit for its potential future spending plans."

In an effort to bring greater accountability in this area, in March I introduced a private member's bill, Bill 112, End the Public Funding of Partisan Government Advertising. The legislation would have returned the Auditor General's power to review proposed government advertisements before they are published or broadcast to verify that they meet certain standards. Unfortunately, the government voted it down and continues to spend millions on partisan advertisements. This is why, under the People's Guarantee, the Progressive Conservative party has committed to restoring the Auditor General's oversight of government advertising. Thirdly, as the PC critic for infrastructure, I was shocked to learn that are 812 provincially owned buildings that are vacant and costing Ontario taxpayers \$19 million a year. The auditor report reveals that 600 of the buildings have been unoccupied for more than eight years and Infrastructure Ontario did not even know when the other 212 buildings became vacant. This is yet another example of government neglecting to its due diligence to ensure your tax dollars are been spent properly.

To read the full Auditor General report, please visit my website at www.sylviajonesmpp.ca

