

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Government goes against position of the Auditor General

Last week, the Provincial government released an update to the legislature regarding the government's finances. In their Public Accounts document, the government claimed the province's 2015-16 deficit is at \$3.5 billion. However Ontario's Auditor General disagreed with the government's numbers and their accounting practices, stating the Province's 2015-16 deficit is actually \$1.5 billion more than what the Liberal government claims.

Ontario's Auditor General is one of the nine independent officers of the legislature that provides oversight on the government's actions. One of the duties of the Auditor General is to review the government's financial accounts and transactions, and report back to the legislature on their findings to ensure public funds are not being misused. After every fiscal year, the government is required to table its financial accounts after the Auditor General has reviewed the finances and provided any commentary, within 180 days after the end of a fiscal year.

The Auditor General first raised concerns about the government's irregular accounting practices in June of this year and again in September. Unfortunately, the provincial government disagreed with the Auditor General's comments and circumvented the Auditor's authority by releasing the unaudited version of the government's finances. This is the first time in the province's history that a version of the Public Accounts documents has been released despite being unaudited. It's clear the government had no interest in listening to the Auditor's concerns. This is not the first time the Liberal government has disagreed with the Auditor General. In 2014, the government disagreed with the Auditor's concerns with the Province's Smart Meter system, claiming the Auditor doesn't understand the Province's electricity system, even though the Auditor worked for Manitoba Hydro for a decade.

In addition to circumventing the Auditor General, the government has stonewalled other independent officers of the legislature, including Ontario's Financial Accountability Officer (FAO). This summer, the FAO highlighted the government's unwillingness to provide information they are obligated to under the Financial Accountability Officer Act. In addition, the government has stripped away all independent oversight over the operations of Hydro One, including preventing the Auditor General from performing audits on Hydro One and its subsidiaries, as well as preventing the Ontario Ombudsman from investigating public complaints against its subsidiaries.

This government promised being open and transparent, but they are anything but that. This lack of openness and transparency constrains the duties of our officers of the legislature as well as both opposition parties, to hold the government accountable. The people of Ontario deserve better.

