

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Ontario budget needs to address pressing issues

The Liberal government is set to announce its 2017 budget today (Thursday).

The Progressive Conservative caucus has several requests for the budget.

First, the government needs to take action on the growing debt. Ontario's debt is a staggering \$300 billion, and according to the independent Financial Accountability Officer (FAO), the net debt is set to rise to \$370 billion by 2020. This means that every Ontarian is on the hook for \$22,103, or enough money to buy a 2017 Chevy Cruze. The debt is leaving less money for funding essential services. We spend more than \$11 billion a year paying the interest, making servicing the debt the third largest expenditure of the Ontario government, behind only Education and Health. The province now spends more on interest than on post-secondary education, community safety and five other ministries combined.

While the Liberals promise to present a 'balanced' budget, but we know from the FAO that this 'balanced' budget is not sustainable due to the government's structural deficit. Policy experts, stakeholders, including the Auditor General and the Financial Accountability Office, have poked holes in the Liberal's balanced budget promise. The reality is that the only way the Liberals will 'balance' the budget will be through higher taxes, deeper cuts to our schools and hospitals and the fire sale of Hydro One, making the 'balanced' budget a one-time phenomenon, rather than a sustainable future for Ontario.

The government also needs to end the hydro crisis. The Liberals' current plan will only add billions of dollars in future costs and does not fix the structural problems that they created. The government needs to stop signing contracts for energy we don't need, stop the fire sale of Hydro One and stop out of control executive pay in the energy sector.

The hydro crisis is not the only crisis that this government created. The government's policies of adding red tape and delays to the housing market have created the housing crisis. That is why the Progressive Conservative caucus recommended the government take measures to address supply and demand, establish a panel of industry experts and review the government housing portfolio.

Unfortunately, the Liberals' announced plan does not do anything to address the structural problems of supply which are driving up the cost of housing.

Additionally, the government needs to make cap-and-trade revenue neutral. The current Liberal cap-and-trade scheme takes \$2 billion out of the pockets of Ontarians to be spent on the government's pet projects. The government should be ensuring that any money generated by cap-and-trade should go back into the pockets of hard working Ontario families.

As the Liberals announce their budget today, I hope they will seriously consider these recommendations.

