

Throne speech impressed Liberals, but that's about it

By Bill Rea

The Wynne government set out a list of priorities Monday when Lt.-Gov. Elizabeth Dowdeswell delivered the speech from the Throne, but others are wondering what was the point of it all.

"I think you'd be hard pressed to call it more than a political ploy," Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones remarked.

The government said it is investing more in the care and services that people across the province rely on, according to a release issued from Queen's Park shortly after the speech.

It added the upcoming Budget will focus on doing more in health care, home care, mental health care and child care services, as well as expanding a number other programs. It also maintained the economy is strong, with unemployment at its lowest level in almost two decades.

"I hear from people every day who put caring first - whether it's at home, caring for their families, or at work, caring for patients, students or society's most vulnerable people," Premier Kathleen Wynne said. "The people of Ontario are our greatest strength, and our government doesn't accept that anyone should be left to fend for themselves, particularly in this turbulent, changing economy." "We're taking bold steps to ensure the best care for our children, our seniors and our friends and family members," she added. "Our plan will relieve pressure on families by making it easier for people to care for themselves and for each other."

But Jones wasn't impressed with such an event taking place this close to the upcoming June election, as she wondered why they staged this.

"They didn't have a lot of their legislative agenda," Jones pointed out. "They didn't lose a great deal."

"It gives them a bit of a media bump," she added.

The contents of the speech didn't come as much of a surprise to Jones, who noted the government has been making announcements and promises for years, then repeating them a year or so later.

"I guess we all feel a little jaded," she remarked.

Jones said there have been rumours that the government wants to pass its Budget, scheduled to be brought down March 28, before the election, while others suggest they want to take it before the voters. She said Finance Minister Charles Sousa has said he wants it passed before the election.

"Who knows?" she said.

"With the strong economy and the lowest unemployment rate in a decade, now is the time to invest in the quality of family life - in care and not in cuts," Dufferin-Caledon Liberal candidate Bob Gordanier stated Tuesday. "Yesterday's throne speech promised more support to families - hospital funding, home care, dental care, pharmacare, improved mental health and addiction services and help with child care costs. I am proud to be associated with better supports for families. In a fast-changing world and families need help to thrive."

"It's definitely a case of how much can we throw at the people of Ontario," Trillium Party candidate Andrew Nowell observed.

He said it offers nice things, like free tuition, but there are no details on how it's to be paid for. He said he expects it will be through higher taxes.

"It's like free tickets on the Titanic," he remarked.

"This isn't something for the people of Ontario," he said. "Just buying votes."

"It's very expensive," Dufferin-Caledon Green party candidate Laura Campbell commented. "It's using taxpayers' money to unveil a little bit of their election platform."

She pointed out, for example, the government already has a pharmacare plan, wondering why they didn't do it right the first time.

"It seems like kind of a desperate gamble to steal some of the limelight from the very progressive NDP platform," she added.