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ONTARIO'S NEW SKILLED TRADES AND APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM – A PRIMER

The province's new skilled trades and apprenticeship system is administered by two organizations:

1. The Ministry of Labour Training and Skills Development (MLTSD); and
2. A recently launched organization called Skilled Trades Ontario (STO).

MLTSD has oversight of:

- trades legislation and regulation including:
 - prescribing/deprescribing trades
 - scopes of practice
 - trade classifications (compulsory or voluntary)
 - journeypersons to apprentice ratios.
- compliance and enforcement through its Occupational Health and Safety Inspectorate

MLTSD's web page addressing the skilled trades can be found at the following link: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/skilled-trades>

STO is responsible for:

- establishing apprenticeship programs, including training standards, curriculum standards and certification exams
- assessing experience and qualifications of individuals who have not completed an apprenticeship program in Ontario
- issuing Certificates of Qualification in all trades with certifying exams
- renewing Certificates of Qualification in compulsory trades
- maintaining a Public Register of people authorized to work in compulsory trades (note: the public register will only list those in compulsory trades)
- conducting research in relation to apprenticeship and the trades
- promoting careers in the skilled trades

For more information about STO, click on the following link: <https://www.skilledtradesontario.ca/>

FAO'S 2021 ONTARIO LABOUR MARKET REPORT – HIGHLIGHTS

The Financial Accountability Office (FAO) released its 2021 Ontario Labour Market Report on February 23rd.

The report notes that construction employment in Ontario in 2021 was 6,000 jobs below the pre-pandemic level

Here are the highlights copied from the report:

“This report provides an update on Ontario’s labour market performance in 2021. It presents a summary of the overall labour market in the province, followed by information for demographic groups, industries, major cities, immigrants and visible minorities. The report highlights some major challenges facing Ontario’s labour market and provides a brief update on the impact of the COVID-19 Omicron variant on the labour market in January 2022.

- Total employment in Ontario rebounded strongly in 2021 as pandemic-related restrictions were eased
- Following the sharp job loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns, Ontario employment rebounded strongly in 2021, with jobs increasing by 344,800 (a 4.9 per cent rise compared to 2020). This marked the largest annual job gain on record and raised employment essentially to the 2019 pre-pandemic level.
- The province’s annual unemployment rate declined to 8.0 per cent in 2021, down from 9.6 per cent in 2020. Despite this progress, the unemployment rate in 2021 was well above the pre-pandemic rate, as a larger number of job seekers entered the labour market looking for work. Employment recovery was uneven,

with some groups remaining far below pre-pandemic levels

- Strong job gains were observed among all age groups. Despite recording the fastest job growth in 2021, youth (15-24 years) employment was 6.9 per cent below the 2019 pre-pandemic level. • Female workers saw larger job gains in 2021 compared to males. However, overall female employment in the province remained slightly below the pre-pandemic level, reflecting weak job recovery among young females.
- Almost all major industry groups recorded higher employment in 2021. Faced with ongoing restrictions, employment in low-wage industries with close customer contact, including accommodation and food services, wholesale and retail trade, and transportation and warehousing, remained below pre-pandemic levels.
- Employment increased noticeably across most major Ontario cities. However, employment in 2021 remained below pre-pandemic levels for 11 of the 16 major cities, with Greater Sudbury (5.6 per cent lower than 2019) the farthest from recovery. Lingering effects of the pandemic continue to pose challenges to many workers
- Despite the strong overall job recovery, there are challenges related to long-term labour market trends and the lingering impacts of the pandemic. Some workers have struggled with unemployment for long periods of time, others are affected by a shift in skill requirements to softer and more advanced technical abilities,

and hiring difficulties persist despite record job vacancies, notably in accommodation and food services. 2 Omicron variant caused temporary setback in the province's labour market in early 2022

- With select COVID-19-restrictions re-enacted in January 2022, employment dropped by 145,700 while the unemployment rate rose more than a full percentage point to 7.3 per cent. However, employment is expected to rebound as the economy reopened in February"

The full report can be found at the following link:

<https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/labour-market-2022>

HHCA TAKE HOME THE CONSTRUCTION ASSOCIATIONS CURLING CROWN

Congratulations to the rink from the Hamilton-Halton Construction Association for winning the 2022 edition of the Ontario Construction Associations Curling Bonspiel. In the championship contest, the HHCA squad led by Sue Ramsay along with Jeff Bellbeck and Brad Gordon bested the perennial also-rans from the Windsor Construction Association led by Dan Hansen and his teammates Marty Gaudet, Craig Mason and Luc Pignal.

We can't say enough about the warm and exceedingly generous hospitality shown to all participants by the hosts, the Windsor Construction Association. Curling and the surrounding social times were held at the spectacular Beach Grove Golf and Country Club with side trip for an 8 course Italian dinner at Spago Trattoria in Windsor's Little Italy district and a lunch at Johnny Shotz Billiards Bar Cafe.

In addition to the teams from HHCA and WCA in the annual showdown there were crews from the GVCA, LDCA, IHSA/WCA, Northern Ontario (CATB and NOCA) and of course the COCA-nuts.

ANNUAL PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

COCA's pre-budget advice was submitted to the government in advance of the deadline on February 11th and was approved by the Executive Committee at its meeting on February 21st. Our pre-budget submission titled "Building Towards a Brighter Future" echoing the theme of our recently published 2021 Year in Review, made the following recommendations:

1. Provide relief for contractors from pandemic related delay claims and unanticipated costs
2. Strengthen the province's workers' compensation system
3. Invest in public infrastructure maintenance and expansion; Deliver fully on your planned Infrastructure Program
4. Undertake a review of the Construction Act
5. Accelerate the development of Ontario's new Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship System
6. Work with the Federal Government to admit more immigrants with skilled trades qualifications

BILL 84 COUNTERS PC'S OWN FISCAL DISCIPLINE - ALLOWS DELAY OF BUDGET PRESENTATION

On February 23, Nina Tangri, the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, introduced Bill 84, Fewer Fees, Better Services Act, 2022. The Bill is an omnibus Bill enacting two new statutes:

- At Your Service Act, 2022.
- Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, 2022
- and amending nine others:
- Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017
- Fiscal Sustainability, Transparency and Accountability Act, 2019
- Highway 407 East Act, 2012.
- Highway Traffic Act
- The Laurentian University of Sudbury Act, 1960
- Licence Appeal Tribunal Act, 1999
- Liquor Licence and Control Act, 2019
- Mining Act
- Minister of Infrastructure Act, 2011

Schedule 1 enacts the At Your Service Act, 2022. This Act provides that Ministries and prescribed entities shall comply with any service standards that apply to them under the Act. If a service standard is a guaranteed service standard, a refund or compensation may be payable for a failure to comply with the service standard.

Schedule 2 enacts the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, 2022. This Act requires public sector entities, as defined in the Act, to give Ontario businesses preference when conducting procurement processes for goods and services under a specified threshold amount. The Lieutenant Governor in Council is given regulation-making authority to determine the details of the requirement, including which businesses are considered to be Ontario businesses, how those businesses are to be given preference, and which goods

and services are affected and under what threshold amount.

Schedule 11 amends the Minister of Infrastructure Act, 2011 to require the Minister to establish a centre of realty excellence to carry out certain functions with respect to use and disposal of government property.

The most controversial part of the Bill is Schedule 4 which amends the Fiscal Sustainability, Transparency and Accountability Act, 2019 to provide that the deadline for the release of the budget in respect of the 2022-2023 fiscal year is April 30, 2022. These amendments if passed will allow the government to introduce the spring budget as late as April 30, 2022. It runs counter to the fiscal discipline put in place by the Ford government in 2019 that requires minister of finance to present the spring budget not later than March 31 each year (before the start of the new fiscal year) and if this is not done both the minister and the premier shall be assessed a fine equal in amount to 10% of their salaries.

We have always expected that our PC government's spring budget will be a presentation of its re-election platform. With this Schedule 4 change, we could see the following scenario play out

- the budget, full of pre-election pork and promises could be tabled as late as April 30th
- then, with little or no debate on the budget in the legislature, the spring session might almost immediately be terminated
- the 28-day election campaign is officially scheduled to start on May 5th

Not exposing their budget proposals to scrutiny by the opposition parties and debate in the legislature and all the media coverage that it normally attracts will serve to the advantage of the Tories.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN THE SPRING SESSION

The Ontario legislature resumed sitting on February 22nd after its 10-week winter break. The legislature could be in session for a total of 8 sitting weeks with two constituency weeks mixed in there. Here's what you might expect in the upcoming session:

The government will table its 2022 budget (if Bill 84 is passed, the tabling of the budget can take place as late as April 30). The budget will lay out the PC's re-election platform

The government is expected to introduce a Bill to make it illegal for protesters to block critical infrastructure

The government could introduce a Bill that provides gig workers and vulnerable workers access to portable benefits plans

The government could introduce a Bill to act on some of the recommendations of the Housing Affordability Task Force

The 28-day election campaign is scheduled to commence on May 5th. The Ontario general election is scheduled for June 2nd.

MPPS NOT SEEKING RE-ELECTION

Here's a list of the MPPs that have announced that they will not be seeking re-election in the June 2, 2022 Ontario general election

Progressive Conservative

- Amy Fee – Kitchener South-Hespler
- Darryl Kramp – Hastings-Lennox and Addington
- Gila Martow – Thornhill
- Jim McDonnell – Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry
- Jane McKenna – Burlington
- Norm Miller – Parry Sound - Muskoka
- Randy Pettapiece – Perth-Wellington
- Rod Phillips – Ajax
- Bill Walker-Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound
- Jeff Yurek -Elgin-Middlesex-London

NDP

- Ian Arthur – Kingston and the Islands
- Percy Hatfield-Windsor-Tecumseh
- Taras Natyshak- Essex

Liberal

- Kathleen Wynne – Don Valley West

Independent

- Lindsey Park – Durham (elected as a PC)
- Jim Wilson – Simcoe Grey (elected as a PC)

GOVERNMENT REDUCES CANADIAN CONTENT REQUIREMENTS FOR SUBWAY CARS

Government of Ontario transit vehicle procurement policy, established in 2008 by the then Liberal government, requires that at least 25% of transit vehicles purchased with Ontario government funds must be Canadian made

The NDP appear to have in their possession a leaked copy of the RFP for the purchase of subway cars for the Ontario Line; they allege that the RFP requires only 10% Canadian content for subway cars

The government skirted NDP questioning about the reduced Canadian content for transit vehicles for the Ontario Line by simply insisting that more than 75% of the entire project will be Canadian content

FORMER TORY MPP TO SEEK RE-ELECTION UNDER ONTARIO PARTY BANNER

After being ejected from the Tory caucus for refusing to get vaccinated against COVID19 in August 2021, Rick Nicholls, the MPP for Chatham-Kent-Leamington, initially stated that he would not be seeking re-election in the June 2, 2022 Ontario general election. Nicholls, who was first elected in 2011 and re-elected in 2014 and 2018 as a PC, was also removed as Deputy Speaker when he was booted out of the Tory caucus.

However, he soon found a home in the newly formed Ontario Party which Nicholls has characterized as “a true conservative party.” Interestingly, the Ontario Party was formed by former MP Derek Sloan who himself was ejected from the federal Tory caucus. Nicholls recently announced that he will be seeking re-election in Chatham-Kent-Leamington under the Ontario Party banner.

POPULAR BARRIE MAYOR TO RUN FOR THE LIBERALS

It seems the voters in Barrie-Springwater-Oro-Medonte will have a difficult choice to make on June 2nd.

The riding is currently held by PC MPP and Attorney General Doug Downey. The riding was created in 2015 and first contested in the 2018 Ontario general election when Downey won with almost 45% of the vote and a wide margin over the second place finisher. Downey worked in judicial administration before attending law school and after graduating he practiced real estate law and was a town councillor in Orillia. He is thought to be likeable and a competent Attorney General.

Complicating Downey’s re-election hope was the recent announcement by the popular 3-term mayor of Barrie, Jeff Lehman, that he will be seeking the Liberal nomination. A planner and economist by profession, Lehman is also chair of the province’s coalition of large urban municipalities. He is smart, knowledgeable, a balanced thinker, articulate, telegenic and he knows his way around the block. Lehman, until now a non-partisan, would be a significant asset on the Liberal benches if he is able to unseat Downey.

This will make Barrie-Springwater-Oro-Medonte a riding to watch in the upcoming Ontario general election.

LEGISLATURE CALLS ON MPP RANDY HILLIER TO APOLOGISE

Prior to his first election to the Ontario legislature in 2007, Randy Hillier was the founder and president of the Lanark Landowners Association, he helped to launch other landowner association chapters across the province and he engaged in various acts of civil disobedience

He was first elected in the Ontario general election of 2007 as a PC in a riding then called Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington on a populist platform, narrowly defeating his Liberal opponent; he served unhappily in the PC caucus under the leadership of John Tory

After Tory's resignation, Hillier ran for the Party's leadership, a contest won by Tim Hudak. Hillier placed a distant fourth among four candidates but threw his support behind Hudak

Some consider Hillier simply to be independent while others see him as a radical, a rebel and a renegade; he has shown himself not to be a team player in the political party tradition and has chosen to break ranks with his caucus' positions several if not many times

Hillier was re-elected with wide margins of victory in 2011, 2014 and again in 2018 in the newly formed riding of Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston

Throughout his political career, Hillier has used rude language and displayed erratic behaviours that are uncharacteristic of MPPs in the legislative chamber

He was expelled from the PC caucus in February 2019 for making disparaging comments about parents of children with autism and has sat in the legislature as an independent ever since; he is now the leader of the Ontario First Party, the Ontario wing of the Maxime Bernier led Peoples Party of Canada (PPC)

During the pandemic, Hillier frequently posted COVID-19 misinformation and conspiracy theories

He has been ticketed for breaking public health rules,

He attended and supported the occupation of downtown Ottawa

He called the federal Minister of Transport Omar Alghabra "a terrorist"

In his tweets he urged his followers to jam 911 emergency lines in Ottawa

On the first day of the Spring 2022 session, Government House Leader and Minister Legislative Affairs and Minister of Long-Term Care Paul Calandra introduced a motion to authorize the Speaker not to recognize Hillier in the chamber until he has issued an apology in writing to the federal Transport Minister which in the eyes of the Speaker is sincere. The motion passed unanimously

A second motion, also introduced by Calandra, that expressed disapproval of and to disassociate itself from Hillier's disreputable conduct, was also passed by the legislature

Hillier will be of little service to the constituents in Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston if he is barred from the chamber

It will be interesting to see if Hillier's recent behaviours and the actions taken by his colleagues in the Ontario legislature have any impact on his prospects for re-election in the June 2, 2022 Ontario general election. Hillier will face off against PC candidate John Jordan, a seasoned social service agency executive, Liberal Amanda Pulker-Mok, an educator and former Mississippi Mills Town Councillor and NDP flag bearer Steve Garrett, also an educator and former Kingston City Councillor