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November
2008

Oakville Beaver

Hospital projects should come first

In the wake of the recent Economic Statement issued by Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan it is apparent why Oakville's hospital has been delayed.

The province is broke.

Mr. Duncan said Ontario will slip into deficit this year. I suspect he is not giving us the whole story and his small deficit announcement is likely a warm up for a much larger deficit by year end.

The McGuinty Liberal record on in-year shortfalls is not sparkling. They inherited the previous government's \$2 billion SARS shortfall in the middle of a fiscal year and ballooned it to more than \$5 billion by the end of that year.

Success in blaming the previous government for that entire deficit has them playing the blame game most of the time, instead of taking the hard road and fixing problems. Their current favourite target is the federal government.

Such tactics are common with newly elected governments but the McGuinty Liberals have governed Ontario for five years.

One thing is for sure, the government's excuse that there are not enough available construction trades to build the hospital has proved to be an invention. The McGuinty Liberals were caught red-handed promoting Ontario building trades for overseas projects during a recent trade mission to the Middle East.

My assertion in this space in September that the government is delaying the hospital because they do not give it a high enough priority is more apparent than ever.

A cut to spending cannot come via a delay in overdue projects that impact real people. The government should come clean with its deficit and spending problems. There should be no debate on the need for Oakville's hospital versus the need to count cormorants in provincial parks, or some other apparently worthy project.

The debate should be on which government program should be shelved to free up the necessary funds to build Oakville's hospital.

Governance is about making tough decisions. It's about making the necessary adjustments to fulfil obligations and cutting less important programs when conditions change.

Oakville and the rest of Halton have been forced onto the path of rapid growth for several years thanks to the McGuinty Liberal 'Places to Grow' plan. That plan forgot to include the costs of new medical facilities in areas with greatly expanded populations.

Needless to say, with the government's history of avoiding the tough decision, with a steep economic downturn on the horizon and with the delay of Oakville's hospital already a reality, I am fearful that the one year delay in construction might stretch into two, three or more.

It's about priorities. It's about people. Much as I like cormorants I think the people of Oakville and their medical needs come first. Now we have to convince the McGuinty Liberals to see it that way.

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