



TED CHUDLEIGH

MPP Halton

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CHUDLEIGH INTRODUCES BILL CALLING FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY

The eHealth Ontario Spending Accountability Act, 2009 will build on the work of Ontario's Auditor General

(Queen's Park) - Yesterday, Ted Chudleigh MPP (Halton) and PC Critic to the Attorney General introduced the *eHealth Ontario Spending Accountability Act, 2009*. The Bill will ensure accountability for taxpayers' money by requiring a public inquiry to address the remaining questions surrounding the eHealth scandal.

In his report, the Auditor General acknowledged that he was unable to investigate some of the most significant questions surrounding the one billion dollar eHealth scandal.

"There are questions that still demand answers. Ordering a public inquiry means accounting for taxpayers' money and ensuring this waste doesn't happen again. The Liberals are either avoiding accountability or just don't get it," said Chudleigh.

"Ontarians can't keep footing the Bill for Liberal scandals. The Liberals need to anti-up for their mistakes," added Chudleigh.

When the Liberals blocked top bureaucrats from speaking about the eHealth scandal, and after George Smitherman and David Caplan resigned from their Cabinet posts, the lack of accountability began to smother this scandal.

"The PC Caucus recognizes that the one billion dollars wasted by the Liberals was not McGuinty's, it was Ontario taxpayers' who expected and trusted that it would be spent wisely. It wasn't. Ontarians deserve to know how this scandal was allowed to happen and to ensure it doesn't happen again; right now, only the Liberals have the answers and that's not acceptable," added Chudleigh.

"The Liberals talk a lot about accountability and this Bill will be their test: is it just rhetoric or will they act and support my Bill," asked Chudleigh.

QUICK FACTS

- Under the *eHealth Ontario Spending Accountability Act, 2009* the Lieutenant Governor in Council will order a Commission to address the unanswered questions surrounding Ontario's Electronic Health Records Initiative sixty days after the Bill is passed.
- To ensure public accessibility, thirty days after the Commission has been appointed a website will be developed. The website will include a live web cast of the inquiry when the Commission is in session.
- To ensure public accountability, the reports of the Commission will be made publicly available.
- To ensure effective and efficient fiscal management the Auditor General will prepare an audit of the Commission.
- In light of the work completed by the Auditor General, and to ensure an effective use of taxpayers' money, twelve months after the inquiry has begun the Commission must submit its' final report to the Lieutenant Governor in Council.
- The Auditor General's Report suggested that there may have been deliberate collusion and bid-rigging at eHealth. A public inquiry can examine the details of the bidding process.
- The Auditor General's Report highlighted how the Management Board of Cabinet played a role in waiving the rules for untendered contracts. Members of the Cabinet have admitted that the Management Board approved awarding untendered contracts. A Public Inquiry can fully investigate how extensively members of the Management Board were involved in the eHealth Scandal.
- The Auditor General reported instances of overt obstruction while he was trying to complete his investigation. This represents a potential abuse of power that should be part of an independent inquiry into the eHealth scandal.
- The Auditor General's probe lacked the mandate and resources to complete a full examination of the eHealth scandal. A public inquiry can use the work previously completed and address the remaining questions.

Questions and Answers

Why are you asking for this public inquiry today?

There are a number of troubling questions from the Auditor General's Report that remain unanswered and that we believe Ontarians deserve answers to. Details in the report raise serious and grave questions about the possibility of price-fixing, bid-rigging, insider information. There are also unanswered questions about how Liberal friends may have benefited personally from this scandal and what role Premier McGuinty, Deputy Premier George Smitherman and the powerful Management Board of Cabinet played in all of this.

What is the difference between the Auditor General's Report, and a full Public Inquiry? Why a Public Inquiry?

The Auditor General's scope was limited and did not have the investigative tools to subpoena and examine important documents like bank records, phone records, etc.

A full public inquiry will use these powerful investigative tools to provide insight as to why this happened, who benefited and what role Dalton McGuinty and George Smitherman played throughout. In short, this is the kind of comprehensive investigation is necessary to get to the bottom of this scandal. We were lead to believe a few Liberal friendly consultants billing a little extra were isolated incidents but with a billion dollars wasted the problem seems much larger than that.

Why are you calling for this inquiry when the Public Accounts Committee is doing an investigation themselves?

The Public Accounts Committee does not have the scope and mandate necessary to ensure answers to questions of importance to Ontario taxpayers like the Gomery Inquiry did into the sponsorship scandal.

The Liberals have stonewalled previous efforts to get to the bottom of the eHealth scandal at the Government Agencies' Committee, as well as voting against our Opposition Day motion to broaden the powers of the Public Accounts Committee to call witnesses and subpoena testimony, if necessary. The McGuinty Liberals have tried to bury their billion dollar boondoggle at every turn and hide the true extent of the abuses at eHealth and the Ministry.

Are you saying the Auditor didn't do his job?

While the Auditor General has done good work, he did not have the mandate or resources to get to the bottom of this issue and provide all of the answers that Ontario families are looking for.

Are the changes announced by the Government not sufficient to ensure this doesn't happen again?

No. We can't move forward to fix these problems until we know just how big these problems are. We also need clear answers on who was responsible for these problems in the first place.

Isn't calling for this public inquiry just a political stunt meant to harass the Premier?

Absolutely not, an inquiry like this is the only way to uncover the truth about the full extent of the abuses to ensure they don't happen again. This isn't just a few Liberal friendly firms who billed a little extra on the side -- this is a billion dollars gone with very little to show for it. The taxpayers of Ontario deserve to know exactly where their hard-earned tax dollars were wasted and who benefited from these sweetheart deals.

Given the revelations and new questions that have been raised as a result of the Auditor General's Report, this mismanagement has risen to a whole new level of scandal, and we all have a right to know all the details about what happened.

Is there any precedence for something like this?

Yes. We take the call for a public inquiry very seriously. Certainly if you look at the Gomery Inquiry's precedent setting investigation into the sponsorship scandal, that only dealt with the loss of a few hundred million dollars, there is certainly a strong case for a public inquiry to look at the loss of a billion dollars here in Ontario.

In the past, the PC Caucus has only called for a public inquiry one other time and that was to deal with another very serious problem with a convicted violent offender who was let out on bail and killed two people.

The reality is that after seeing how the Liberals have sought to stonewall attempts by the Auditor General and a Legislative Committee, a Public Inquiry with the proper authority is the only way to get answers.

Do you think progress on electronic health records should be halted while this inquiry is ongoing? Aren't you just delaying this initiative further?

It's sad that after all these years we're out a billion taxpayer dollars with very little to show on electronic health records. I believe it is necessary to see progress on electronic health records so better care can be provided to more patients in more places. But I also believe that getting to the bottom of what went wrong at eHealth will only help that process.

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For more information contact:
Ted Chudleigh
416.325.5747