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FRANKLY SPEAKING

That Billion Dollar Scandal really means nothing until...
By Frank Klees, MPP
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The Auditor General had just released her scathing report on the Oakville Power Plant scandal the night before. I was sitting at my desk in the Legislature watching as the Premier responded to questions about her role in this latest in a series of government scandals. In case you forgot:

eHealth?ORNGE?Mississauga Power Plant?Oakville Power Plant
The first of two key findings of this latest report was it would ultimately cost Ontario taxpayers as much as $1.1 billion for the Liberal government's decision to cancel two gas-fired power plants to save five Liberal seats in the 2011 election. The second was that if the file had been handled differently, the penalties could have been avoided altogether.

Here was the question from the Leader of the Official Opposition:
?The reality is, Premier, your fingerprints are all over this. You actually signed the deal. You had a choice. You had an option. You could have said, ?No, this is not in the interests of taxpayers. This is bad for the province of Ontario.? You could have set a higher standard, but you signed the deal, you signed the document. If you're going to do that and sell us up the river, why should we trust you with the finances of this province??

The Premier's response:
?I have said, in the first instance, that there were decisions made that should not have been made, that we should have paid closer attention to the community. I have never said, as the Leader of the Opposition alleges, that I didn't take any responsibility. In fact, I've said the exact opposite. I was part of a cabinet that made this decision, and we worked to make the decision in the best way possible. There were mistakes made. I have apologized and I do apologize for those mistakes, but my responsibility now is to make sure that this never happens again, that we have the processes in place to make sure it never happens again.?

As I listened to that response, I wondered how my constituents would react to this mea culpa by the Premier - this matter-of-fact admission by her that bad decisions had been made by her and her government, this cavalier acceptance of responsibility and this apology that bears no consequences for her or anyone in her cabinet or anyone in the ranks of the bureaucracy?
Would the people who hear and read about this apology understand what a difference

Would it help if people knew that $1.1 billion could have paid for any one or a combination of the following:

? 242,727 more seniors to receive home care
? 19,705 more long term care beds
? 84 million of the physiotherapy treatments that were recently cut
? 18,000 new nurses
? 277 new MRI machines or 1.3 million MRI procedures
? 18,333 IBI therapies for children with autism
? 36 million PSA Prostate tests that OHIP refuses to cover
Would it help if people knew that two days before the release of this report, I received an email from my constituent Mel Hughes of Newmarket, once again pleading for help for her 20-year-old son Cody?

A twenty-four month wait to see a surgeon threatens the permanent loss of flexibility in his wrist.

?I cannot tell you what we are feeling. My nerves are completely shot. It is outrageous that despite every hurdle we have to get through with this disease, there are always issues with our healthcare making the struggles even harder. I am asking you to assist our family again in getting Cody an emergency appointment to at least see if replacement is an option rather than we take that option

away from a young child because of wait times....?

Would it make a difference, if people could see past that $1.1 billion number into the lives of their family, their friends and neighbours who are being denied essential services because of the callous decisions of a few self-serving politicians?
Within hours of the Premier making her historic apologies, I read two petitions into the record. One was on behalf of the more than 850,000 Ontarians who are living with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and the other was on behalf of the 467,000 to 654,000 children and youth who have at least one mental health disorder and are not receiving treatment.
In both cases, there is a desperate need for funding. The respiratory rehabilitation program in York Region was recently cancelled and the wait list for youth mental health assessment is months long.

Send me your thoughts at
www.frankklees.com