

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Down to Business

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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One of the great joys of being an elected official is the invitations I receive to events in Aurora and Newmarket. This past weekend I attended two very different events.

On Saturday, Audrey and I attended the Black Tie Kick Off for the Newmarket Jazz+ Festival.

George St. Kitts, a key figure in organizing the event and, himself, an internationally acclaimed entertainer par excellence, was on hand to give us a small sampling of what's to come in Newmarket August 1, 2, 3, and 4. The festival gains new support and grows bigger every year. Congratulations to everyone involved.

On Sunday, I was delighted to bring greetings on behalf of the Premier of Ontario and the Legislature to members of the Aurora Lawn Bowling Club. The club celebrates its 100th birthday this year.

Started by men at Trinity Anglican Church in 1912, the club moved to its current location in McMahon Park in 1930. Today, the group boasts a meticulously maintained bowling green and a clubhouse. The area recently underwent an upgrade and looks spectacular. New members are always welcome.

It never fails to impress me at how important groups like the Jazz Festival and the Aurora Lawn Bowling Club are to our communities. There are literally dozens of organizations in our two towns that are run by volunteers, ask very little of government and provide great service for residents.

They make our communities great places to live and work.

I look forward to meeting many more groups in the years ahead and encourage any organization celebrating an important anniversary or event to contact my office. Contact information can be found at the end of this column.

Since the 41st parliament began sitting July 2 there have been a number of bills introduced to the house. I want to highlight a few of those I consider particularly important.

Bill 1: An Act to perpetuate an ancient parliamentary right.

If you know me, you know I'm fascinated by the traditions of our parliament. It's the 'glue' that helps hold things together. Bill 1 is traditionally introduced by the Premier at the first sitting of each new parliament. Its roots go back to 1558 and the bill is introduced before consideration of the throne speech to perpetuate the right of Parliament to sit and act without permission from the Crown. It passed unanimously.

The Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act proposes a new 10-year, \$2.5 billion fund as part of the government's plan for creating jobs and growing the economy. The fund will help Ontario compete to attract new business and form partnerships to secure investments that will result in economic growth, innovation and jobs.

The MPP Accountability and Transparency Act strengthens political accountability by enhancing oversight, increasing transparency in the government and the broader public sector. Among its important provisions, it will give government the power to control compensation of senior executives in the broader public sector; post expense information for all MPPs and make the province a leader in expense reporting for politicians; and expand the scope of the Ombudsman role to include municipalities, school boards and publicly-assisted universities.

The End Coal for Clean Air Act follows on the government's move to close the sole remaining coal-fired generating plant in Ontario at Nanticoke Generating Station this year. The bill will ensure that electricity in Ontario cannot be made by burning coal.

As an aside, the Columbia Law School's Center for Climate Change Law reported this past January that when financial, health, and environment costs of burning coal are calculated, 'estimated savings from no longer burning coal approach \$4.4 billion per year' in Ontario.

The 2014 Budget lays out a plan for a strong Ontario, with more jobs, more opportunity and a more secure future.

The plan will invest in people, build modern infrastructure, and support a dynamic and innovative business climate.

The deficit for 2013?14 is now estimated to be \$11.3 billion ? a \$0.4 billion improvement compared with the 2013 Budget forecast. This marks the fifth year in a row that the Province is reporting a projected deficit lower than forecast. The government remains committed to balancing the budget by 2017?18.

One final note from the budget ? the people of Ontario are asking for fairness from the Federal Government.

Let me explain: every year, the share of federal revenue raised in Ontario is higher than the share of federal spending in Ontario. This results in an \$11 billion gap between what Ontarians pay, versus what they receive from the federal government.

The Ontario government calls on the federal government to:

- ? Treat Ontarians the same way it treats residents of other provinces.
- ? Protect Ontario from the \$641 million decline in major transfers in 2014-15, as it has done with other provinces in the past.
- ? Significantly increase funding for infrastructure, including matching Ontario's \$1 billion commitment to infrastructure development for the Ring of Fire.

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