

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Opportunity to contribute to Ontario's Budget Preparation

By Chris Ballard, MPP

Newmarket-Aurora

Have a suggestion for this year's provincial budget? Join the York Region pre-budget consultation being held in Thornhill on Friday. I look forward to hearing from many organizations and businesses from across the Region. This will be the last budget the government offers before heading into an election this spring? so your input is key.

Ontario is the first province to commit to funding ideas from the public as part of its budget process. More than 700 ideas have been submitted in key areas, including child care, seniors, small business, students and healthy living. Up to \$5 million is available in Ontario's 2018 Budget to implement the most popular ideas. Those include healthy living, seniors, small business, and student success.

To have your voice heard, visit: ontario.ca/BudgetTalks to vote for your three favourite ideas before 5 p.m., January 26. Selected ideas will be announced as part of the upcoming 2018 Budget.

Electric Vehicles

If there is an electric vehicle in your future, or if you drive one already, there is electrifying news on the horizon.

The new Workplace Electric Vehicle Charging Incentive Program in Ontario is making charging easier for you. This program will assist employers and commercial building owners to install charging stations at their workplaces. The investment is part of Ontario's Climate Change Action Plan and is funded by proceeds from the province's Cap and Invest program. (The program caps greenhouse gas pollution and invests proceeds in Ontario in ways that further reduce greenhouse gas pollution.)

The Workplace Electric Vehicle Charging Incentive Program will provide 80 per cent of the capital costs to install level two chargers, up to \$7,500 per charging space.

Applications opened on Jan. 16, 2018, and will be reviewed and processed in the order they are received, until the program funding is exhausted.

Charging stations at workplaces will make it easier for people to choose electric vehicles.

As Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, I am thrilled that I have this opportunity to help local businesses and employers to make a difference. Please raise this issue in your place of employment and join the effort to reduce vehicle impact on climate change.

Employment

I am always delighted when new companies move into our community bringing with them new jobs and economic development. Whether it's small organizations like restaurants or large organizations like Celestica, the outlook is always good for residents of Newmarket-Aurora.

Our job numbers continue to support this growth. Our unemployment rate is down and is, once again, below the national unemployment rate. This has been the case for the past 32 months.

Net jobs across Ontario since the recessionary low in June 2009 are 838,000, with full-time employment up 778,200. Since this time last year, we have seen an increase of 180,800 jobs ? and most of that increase has been in full-time work. Our economy is strong because ? together ? we've created a competitive business environment, a highly skilled workforce and a low corporate tax rate, while making infrastructure investments that will help sustain our growth for years to come

Ontario Immigration Nominee Program

Good news ? the federal government has increased the province's allocation for our Ontario Immigration Nominee Program (OINP) in 2018. We now have the capacity to nominate permanent residency for 6,600 applicants, which represents an increase of 20 per cent since 2016. The OINP will begin accepting new applications on January 18.

This year, the application process will be entirely online. This is part of a larger modernization of the program designed to deliver make the program easier to access and understand.

Recently, we also expanded the program to welcome a more diverse group of economic immigrants, including those in the skilled trades and in-demand occupations in the construction and agricultural sectors. Our 2018 allocation increase from our federal partners

is recognition of Ontario's role in the economy of the country. OINP will continue to evolve to help our province meet the rapidly-changing labour market needs associated with a global economy.

2018 New Year's Levee

Please join me on Sunday, January 28 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the Ray Twinney Recreation Complex for a free family skate. There will also be refreshments and kid's activities. I look forward to catching up with old friends and making new ones.

Our shared heritage

Yonge Street runs through the heart of our community. It was named for Sir George Yonge, the British Secretary for War, by Ontario's LieutenantGovernor John Graves Simcoe, in 1794.

As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.