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LABOUR MINISTER INCREASES SKILLS FUND

Labour Immigration Training and Skills Development Minister Monte McNaughton recently announced that another \$90 million will be added to the province's Skills Development Fund. According to the ministry's website, "The Skills Development Fund supports:

- projects that address the labour shortage and stimulate growth in key sectors of Ontario's economy
- projects that will increase Ontario's long-term economic competitive advantage by creating a sustainable and resilient workforce
- projects helping people with prior involvement in the criminal justice system, at-risk youth, those with disabilities, Ukrainian newcomers, and others facing barriers to employment"

The Skills Development Fund has already supported almost 400 programs including a digital career fair, mentorship programs, career counselling for apprentices and a program that developed training manuals to teach employers how to accommodate employees with disabilities.

If your association has a project proposal, more information on the Skills Development Fund can be found at: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/skills-development-fund>

ONTARIO RECORDS \$2.1B SURPLUS FOR 2021-22

On September 23rd, the government of Ontario released the 2021-22 Public Accounts which are the final audited financial results of the province for the year ended March 31, 2022. Here are the highlights:

- Actual revenues were 20.2% higher than budgeted
- There were historic levels of expenditures in health care and infrastructure
- The government underspent budgeted amounts in education (\$400M) and in social services (\$800 M)
- The net result is a \$2.1 B surplus for the 2021-22 fiscal year

In its news release, the government warned that this surplus is temporary, that there are challenging times ahead and that Ontarians should not expect surpluses over the next few years. The release also noted that the unexpected surplus for the 2021-22 fiscal year is not unique to Ontario, that many other province's had similar results.

The government will table its Fall Economic Statement, an update on revenues, expenditures and a forecast to the 2022-23 fiscal year end, not later than November 15th.

IHSA LAUNCHES FREE WEBINAR FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

The Infrastructure Health and safety Association has launched a new free webinar, Health and Safety 101 – An orientation for small business owners that explains how Ontario’s Prevention System Partners (including the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development (MLITSD); WSIB; and IHSA) can assist and support small businesses in their health and safety journey. The webinar can be found on IHSA’s small business page - <https://www.ihsa.ca/smallbusiness>

Please let your association’s small contractor members know about this invaluable webinar.

EGLINTON CROSSTOWN DELAYED AGAIN

Metrolinx is the government of Ontario Crown agency responsible for managing the provincial transportation network in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. Among many other things, it is responsible for overseeing the construction of the 19 kilometer (10 kilometers underground), 25 station Eglinton Crosstown rapid transit project that’s valued at more than \$8B. The project is being built by a consortium that includes some of Canada’s largest general contractors along with other domestic and international partners called Crosslinx Transit Solutions, on a Design, Build, Finance, Maintain (DBFM) public-private partnership model.

Construction on the project began in March 2016 and has been the subject of multiple delays for a variety of reasons. After the most recent reassessment, it was expected that construction would be completed and that the line would be in full service this fall.

However, in a blog post on the afternoon of Friday, September 23rd, Metrolinx announced that the project once again has fallen behind its revised schedule and that it will not be in service this fall. The post did not give an expected completion date but some observers predict it could take as long as another 12 months.

The experience with the Eglinton Crosstown has been highly disruptive for GTA commuters and disastrous for businesses in the area of the project. It doesn’t set a positive tone for the soon to begin construction of the 15.6 kilometer Ontario Line, also a DBFM project, which comes with all the complexities of being routed underground beneath Toronto’s downtown core.

NO AUTOMATIC PAY INCREASE FOR MPPS

In its news release about the 2021-22 audited public accounts, the government also announced that it intends to introduce legislation to pause the automatic pay increase MPPs are supposed to receive when the province ends a fiscal year with a surplus. The release stated, “While people are struggling due to increasing costs, politicians should not be getting raises.”

This could be intended as a signal to the province’s public sector unions that MPPs will share the pain of difficult times we’re in and so should they.

PREMIER FORD'S POPULARITY HOLDING STEADY - ANGUS REID SURVEY

The Ontario PCs won the June 2022 general election with approximately 41% of the popular vote. According to the Angus Reid Institute's poll released on September 22nd, Ontario Premier Doug Ford hasn't enjoyed a post-election honeymoon. There are only three provincial premiers less popular than Ford and his popularity has fallen since the last ARI survey.

ARI speculates that Ford's popularity is waning because:

- He is contemplating expanding private health care
- His government passed a Bill that can force seniors who are in hospital and awaiting a place in the long term care home of their choice, into a long term care home that they have not chosen and that could be remote from their families and care givers
- There are ongoing labour negotiations with public sector unions

ARI had Ford's popularity at 43% in March, 45% in June and 41% in September, 2022.

Of the 1,013 Ontarians that responded to the ARI survey, 9% strongly approved of Premier Ford, 32% approved, 22% disapproved, 34% strongly disapproved and 2% were not sure.

Complete results are available at: <https://angusreid.org/premiers-september-2022/>

STILES SEEKING ONTARIO NDP LEADERSHIP

On Thursday September 22nd, Marit Stiles, the MPP for Davenport, announced that she is seeking the leadership of the Ontario New Democratic Party. She is the first candidate to throw their hat in the ring. Here's the skinny on Stiles:

- She was born and grew up in St John's, Newfoundland and Labrador
- She is 52 years of age
- After moving from Newfoundland & Labrador to Toronto, she served as a political staffer for Gilles Bisson, an NDP MPP at that time
- She was president of the federal New Democratic Party from 2016 to 2018
- She was the national director of research, public policy and communications for the Canadian entertainment union the Alliance of Cinema, Television and Radio Arts (ACTRA) from 2005 to 2014
- She served as a trustee on the Toronto District School Board's board of trustees from 2014 to 2018
- She was first elected to the Ontario Legislature in 2018 easily defeating Liberal incumbent Christina Martins in the general election that saw the Kathleen Wynne led Grits swept out of power
- Since the time of her election in 2018, she has served as her party's education critic but has been relieved of that responsibility because of her leadership candidacy

- In the 42nd Ontario parliament she was a member of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies and in the current parliament is a member of the Standing Committee on the Interior
- She has the endorsement of four of her NDP caucus colleagues, Bhutila Karpoche, Kristyn Wong-Tam, Chandra Pasma and Suze Morrison
- She and her spouse, Jordan Berger, live in Toronto and have two daughters

The deadline for candidates to enter the race is December 5th. The Party's new leader will be selected through one-member-one-vote preferential balloting with the final selection announced on March 4, 2023. Catherine Fife, the MPP for Waterloo is expected to add her name to the candidate list very soon, which will make it a good contest.

LIUNA AND CARPENTERS BACK TORY

As a result of his strong commitment to building transit in the City of Toronto, John Tory has received the endorsements of two significant construction unions, LiUNA and the Carpenters. Here's what they had to say:

"On behalf of over 70,000 LiUNA Members in the Greater Toronto Area, we look forward to continuing working collaboratively with John Tory on building and expanding Toronto's Transit network. A growing region requires reliable and resilient infrastructure that will continue to advance economic development, job creation and connectivity. With historic investments by all levels of government, we are building and expanding transformative transit infrastructure that will strengthen the future of the city, support prosperity and build vibrant, inclusive communities."

Joseph Mancinelli, LiUNA International Vice President and Regional Manager of Central and Eastern Canada

"Investment in transit infrastructure is crucial to our city's success, health and vitality. To enable our city to grow and prosper sustainably, transit investment needs to happen. With \$28 billion of transit work underway, John Tory leads by example and highlights the value of collaboration with all three levels of government contributing to the largest transit expansion in North America in decades. These projects will link thousands of housing units to mass transit, making our city far more accessible to far more people"

Mike Yorke, President, Carpenters' District Council of Ontario

For Tory's commitment to transit expansion, click on the following link:

<https://www.johntory2022.ca/news/getting-transit-built>