COCA

Council of Ontario Construction Associations

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS REPORT

July 2026

In This Issue

WSIB Eliminates Cost Relief Benefit for Employers
FAO Expenditure Monitor 2025-26: Q4
Cabinet Shuffle Likely
COCA Convenes Market Sounding for Infrastructure Ontario
Toronto Area PC MPPs Spend on Downtown Hotels Stays, One Minister Resigns
Ford and PC Government Popularity Declining in Recent Liaison Strategies Poll
Two Themes Have Opposition Parties Banging Their Drums
PC MPP and Cabinet Minister Resigns
Government Fixing Unenforceable Anti-Scalping Law
Jim Lyons Retirement Event

WSIB Eliminates Cost Relief Benefit for Employers

Suddenly, unexpectedly and without consultation, the WSIB announced that it is eliminating the Second Injury Enhancement Fund (SIEF).

SIEF provided employers with cost relief in circumstances in which one of their workers who had a pre-existing injury, suffered a subsequent injury and the pre-existing condition contributed to the cause of the subsequent injury or prolonged the claim period of that second injury. It allowed employers to hire workers with pre-existing conditions or disabilities with a level of comfort and confidence. The program's cancellation is nothing short of outrageous.

The consulting firm Deloitte's had conducted a value-for-money audit on SIEF on behalf of the WSIB. The audit, which included minimal consultation with employers, concluded that SIEF could be modified and refined to better align the program's original intent.

There has been no indication from the WSIB that a new program for employers to replace SIEF will be introduced.

Prior to the unanticipated notice about the SIEF cancellation, COCA and the Ontario Business Coalition (OBC) made it clear in terms that were unequivocal, both in-person with and in writing to senior officials at the provincial workers compensation agency, that employers place high value on SIEF and that it should not be touched.

The Ontario Business Coalition has written the Premier and the Minister of Labour asking them to have this decision by the WSIB reversed and SIEF reinstated. A letter writing campaign has also been initiated.

Here are the details from the WSIB:

https://www.wsib.ca/en/operational-policy-manual/second-injury-and-enhancement-fund-sief

Here's advice from our valued member Sherrard-Kuzz LLP:

https://www.sherrardkuzz.com/newsblast/sief-relief-ends-what-ontario-employers-need-to-know/

FAO Expenditure Monitor 2025-26: Q4

Financial Accountability Office of Ontario | Published July 15, 2026 | Unaudited overview of Ontario government spending for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2026.

Changes to the Spending Plan

- Started 2025-26 at $232.5B (2025 Budget); revised up $6.7B (2.9%) to $239.2B by year-end.
- Increases: health +$4.9B (5.4%), postsecondary +$1.4B (10.9%), children/community/social services +$1.1B (5.2%), justice +$0.6B (8.4%), education +$0.3B (0.6%).
- Offset by 'other programs' -$0.5B (-1.3%) and a $1.0B net Contingency Fund drawdown.

Unaudited Spending vs. Revised Plan

- Actual spending: $236.5B — $2.7B (-1.1%) under the revised plan.
- Underspending: 'other programs' -$551M, debt servicing -$524M, postsecondary -$388M, education -$341M, justice -$175M.
- Overspending: health +$1,217M (1.3%); children/community/social services +$3M.
- Contingency Fund ended with $1,989M unspent.

Year-over-Year vs. 2024-25 Audited

- Total spending up $9.2B (4.1%) year-over-year.
- Increases: health +$5,605M (6.1%), education +$2,595M (6.5%), children/community/social services +$692M (3.3%), debt servicing +$553M (3.7%).
- Declines: postsecondary -$126M (-0.9%), justice -$88M (-1.2%), other programs -$21M (-0.1%).
- Final audited figures land in the 2025-26 Public Accounts, due September 2026.

Contingency Fund Activity

- Started at $3.0B. Q1: -$11M; Q2: -$495M; Q3: +$2,050M in / -$1,552M out; Q4: -$4,174M out / +$3,171M in. Year-end balance: $1,989M.

Editors Comments

For those interested in building capacities in skilled trades training, it's interesting to note that:

- For the third and fourth quarters, MLITSD adjusted planned spending downward by $113 million in the SDF Capital stream and by $126 million in the SDF Training stream
- Unaudited actual spending for the period for MLITSD's Ontario Employment System came in $207 million less than 2024-25 audited spending including $140 million less in the SDF Training stream) Source: FAO, Expenditure Monitor 2025-26: Q4

For the full report, click on the following link:
https://fao-on.org/en/report/2025-26-expenditure-monitor-q4/

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GOVERNMENT RELATIONS REPORT

July 2026

Cabinet Shuffle Likely

At time of writing there are three vacancies in Premier Ford's cabinet. They were created by the resignations of Caroline Mulroney (treasury board), Stan Cho (tourism culture and gaming) and Neil Lumsden (sport).

Ministers Jones (health), Bethlenfalvy (finance), Fidelli (economic development job creation and trade), Calandra (education), Lecce (energy) are steady hands in important portfolios and are likely to stay put in any shuffling of the deck chairs.

So, who among the group of eager junior ministers, associate ministers, parliamentary assistants and government backbenchers who might be considered for a promotion? Who are the smart, young, fresh faces that will form the next wave of PC leadership in Ontario. Likely candidates include:

- Monica Ciriello, MPP for Hamilton Mountain, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of the Attorney General and Member of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy
- Michelle Cooper, MPP for Eglinton Lawrence, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Finance
- Graham McGregor, MPP for Brampton North. Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism
- Sam Oosterhof, MPP for Niagara West and Associate Minister of Energy Intensive Industries
- Brian Saunderson, MPP for Simcoe-Grey and Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Economic Development Job Creation and Trade, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Member of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and Member of the Standing Committee on Heritage Infrastructure and Cultural Policy

While the legislature will not resume sitting until October 22, the business of governing continues and these empty chairs around the cabinet table should be filled on a permanent basis. Queen's Park watchers are predicting that Premier Ford will do a minor cabinet shuffle sometime in August.

COCA Convenes Market Sounding for Infrastructure Ontario

On July 29th about 15 COCA members participated in a market sounding exercise conducted by Bob Collins, Adam Cywinski and John O'Grady of Prism Economics on behalf of Infrastructure Ontario. The purpose of the exercise was to garner construction market intel from the front lines of the industry. The session was superbly led by skilled labour market economist Bob Collins who probed for thinking on the impact of such things as geopolitical uncertainty, the oil and gas shock, supply chain issues, labour constraints, technology adoption, modular and per-assembled construction and the state of residential construction in the province. Bob drew the session to a close after the scheduled 90 minutes, but it could have continued for another hour or two.

Thanks to the folks from Prism for choosing COCA as their conduit into the marketplace and for leading such a relevant conversation. And thanks to those who participated.

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Council of Ontario Construction Associations

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS REPORT

July 2026

Toronto Area PC MPPs Spend on Downtown Hotels Stays, One Minister Resigns

According to media reports, several PC MPPs who represent Toronto area ridings in the Ontario legislature, spent significant amounts of taxpayer funding on overnight stays in downtown Toronto hotels. These expenses were claimed under the "special circumstances" allowance for MPP expenses. Here's what's been reported:

- The PC MPP for Brampton East, Hardeep Grewal, spent more than $28,000 of public funds on downtown hotel stays since his election in 2022; Grewal has also been criticized for using his publicly funded constituency budget to buy advertising in a newspaper operated by his father
- Mississauga—Streetsville PC MPP and associate minister for small business, Nina Tangri, spent almost $19,000 in the last three years.
- Brampton Centre PC MPP and associate minister of women's social and economic opportunity, Charmaine Williams, spent nearly $16,000 over the last three years. It's subsequently been reported that Williams has repaid at least a portion of the monies spent
- Markham—Stouffville PC MPP and minister of education, Paul Calandra, spent more than $6,500
- Oakville PC MPP and minister of public and business service delivery and procurement, Stephen Crawford, also spent more than $6,500
- Willowdale PC MPP and minister of tourism culture and gaming, Stan Cho, spent $16,203

Although he was not the biggest spender on downtown hotel stays among Toronto area PC MPPs, it was Cho who decided to or was called upon to resign his cabinet position and take the fall for the government.

- Cho's home is located only a short distance from Queen's Park estimated to be 6 km
- Cho claimed he stayed downtown on nights when the legislature sat late although most of his expenses were claimed in months when there were no late sessions
- Cho will continue to serve as a backbench PC MPP

It seems that PC MPPs representing Toronto area ridings were encouraged by Party officials to book into downtown Toronto hotels on evenings when the legislature was holding late sessions in order to vote on matters before the house, rather than skip the sessions, not vote, and head home early.

Premier Ford has directed his MPPs to repay the misspent funds and has promised to scrap the "special circumstance" allowance for MPP's expenses which is intended for things like severe weather events that make it impossible or dangerous to travel home.

When taken together with Premier Ford's purchase, then sale of an executive jet on the taxpayer's dime, these hotel stay expenses could be interpreted to reflect a culture of entitlement in the Tory caucus.

COCA

Council of Ontario Construction Associations

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS REPORT

July 2026

Ford and PC Government Popularity Declining in Recent Liaison Strategies Poll

A survey of a representative sample of 1000 randomly selected Ontarians taken between July 20 and July 21, 2026, conducted by Liaison Strategies produced the following results:

- If an election was held at the time the poll was taken, 38% of decided and leaning respondent would vote Liberal (unchanged from Liaison's June poll), 33% PC (down 2%), 24% NDP (up 2%), 2% Green and 3% Other
- If an election was held at the time the poll was taken, 33% of all respondents would vote Liberal, 29% PC, 21% NDP, 2% Green, 3% Other and 13% undecided
- 24% of respondents said they approved of Premier Doug Ford's performance while 72% disapproved
- 71% of respondents said the province is headed in the wrong direction while 26% said right direction
- 44% of respondents strongly approve or somewhat approve of allowing more large data centres to be built in Ontario while 42% strongly oppose of somewhat oppose
- 81% of respondents said they believe large data centres should pay for any new electricity generation, transmission and distribution lines that would be needed to service them

For the full story, click on the following link:

https://press.liaisonstrategies.ca/ontario-liberals-lead-pcs-by-5-as-ford-approval-falls-amid-expense-scandal/

Two Themes Have Opposition Parties Banging Their Drums

Both the official opposition NDP and the leaderless Liberals are trying to make hay these days on two main themes:

- In the face of the worst wildfire season on record, the Dippers and the Grits are questioning with good reason the governments preparedness and response
- In the wake of the Premier's purchase and almost immediate turnaround sale of an executive jet and then the "scandalous" use of downtown Toronto hotels for overnight stays by government MPPs from nearby GTA ridings, the NDP and Liberals are accusing the government of being out of touch with Ontarians and entitled.

Let's wait and see if these accusations stick.

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GOVERNMENT RELATIONS REPORT

July 2026

PC MPP and Cabinet Minister Resigns

Neil Lumsden, the PC MPP for Hamilton East – Stoney Creek and the minister of sport, will be retiring from the Ontario legislature as of Aug. 4, 2026.

Here's the 101 on Lumsden:

- Lumsden is 73 years of age
- He is best known as an outstanding Canadian football player having played for the University of Ottawa Gee Gees, the Toronto Argonauts, Hamilton Tiger Cats and Edmonton Eskimos
- After his football playing career, he became a sports marketing consultant and between 1996 and 1999 was involved in football operations with the Ti Cats
- He was first elected to the Ontario legislature in the general election in 2022 in Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, a riding that had been held by the NDP for many years
- In June 2022 he was appointed minister of tourism culture and sport
- In June 2024 the ministry was split into two and Lumsden was appointed minister of sport (Stan Cho became minister of tourism culture and gaming)
- He was re-elected in the general election in 2025 and continued as minister of sport

According to reporting, Lumsden has been dealing with family health issues and his resignation was expected.

Government Fixing Unenforceable Anti-Scalping Law

Ontario's Ticket Resale Price Cap: Enforcement Falling Short

- A law banning ticket resale above face value was folded into the 2026-27 budget bill and rushed into force April 24, ahead of the FIFA World Cup (6 matches hosted in Toronto).
- Government took an education-first approach, writing to resellers (SeatGeek, StubHub, FIFA, VividSeats) to come into compliance rather than penalizing them.
- Tickets on those platforms have continued selling well above face value, with no consequences to date; sellers call the rules unenforceable.
- Brian Berry (Ticket Policy Forum): enforcement was expected before rules for applying the law were finalized — "messy," with "some frustration."
- Key gap: the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement still must draft regulations defining "face value" and how resellers verify it.

For the full story, click on the following link:

https://globalnews.ca/news/11961838/ontario-ticket-resale-regulations/

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GOVERNMENT RELATIONS REPORT

July 2026

Jim Lyons Retirement Event

Click here to book your room