



ONTARIO LEGISLATURE RETURNS FOR SPRING SESSION

@DwightDuncan “House is back tomorrow. Ready to rumble”

The Ontario Legislature reconvened today for its spring session. With MPPs back at Queen’s Park, Hill+Knowlton looks back at the last session and previews the upcoming one.

Where we were

With MPPs sitting for only 12 days during the fall session, campaign promises and rhetoric controlled the debate. The Liberals introduced bills reflective of their platform commitments, such as a home-renovation tax credit, and enacted their 30 per cent university and college tuition credit. The Progressive Conservatives and NDP partnered to defeat the Liberals on a Second Reading vote for a bill that would exempt hydro bills from HST – significant because it was the first vote the Liberals lost in eight years.

Where we are

This session will be about moving beyond campaign promises and about making substantial policy and political decisions. While a number of bills were debated during the last session, no committees were established to review them. Committees have the power to amend legislation, conduct special hearings and can have a real impact on the legislative process during a minority government.

The big question is who will have a majority on the committees. An opposition-controlled committee would be able to pass amendments to government bills and order investigations into troubled agencies, like ORNGE, which could potentially create problems for the Government.

When committees are established, politicians and staffers will have to pay greater attention than usual to them and invest substantial time to their operation because of their increased importance. Although always relevant, political strategizing and decision-making will play a bigger role than usual in this session, since no party can afford to make mistakes.

Where we’re going

In short, it is all about the budget. The next few months will begin to shape Ontario’s political landscape going forward; the budget will be the first opportunity for the Government to present its plan.

This also marks first time the governing Liberals will need to secure support from another party to pass a budget. The budget bill will be the first “confidence vote” of this session, meaning that an election would be called if the Government loses the vote. Although this is unlikely, it remains to be seen what kind of a compromise the Liberals will need to make to pass the budget.

Tim Hudak indicated during his party’s recent convention stated that his “real voice” didn’t come through in the last election, and pledged a turn to more conservative policies; however, whether this results in a shift in party dynamics is still up in the air.

