

New finance minister agrees with premier's plan

By CHRIS CLAY
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Ontario Finance Minister and Mississauga South MPP Charles Sousa has taken to heart Premier Kathleen Wynne's message of reaching out to Opposition parties.

Speaking with media yesterday following the throne speech, Wynne talked about the importance of working with the PCs and NDP to get the business of governing the province moving.

"My hope is that the members of the Opposition have heard how closely I've listened to their concerns and the concerns of people around the province," Wynne told reporters.

Sousa, meanwhile, said he will get in touch with Opposition parties as he prepares the budget.

"Premier Wynne wants to work with members of the Opposition and I'm certainly going to have consultations (with them) in regards to the budget," said Sousa. "I think it's critical for us to work together."

The minister believes a number of the initiatives that were revealed in the throne speech, which included a \$300-million venture capital fund, achieving labour peace with teacher unions, a commitment to eliminate Ontario's \$12-billion deficit by 2017/18 and tackling gridlock, should appeal to "both sides of the House." He believes it will be



Charles Sousa

enough to stop an early election.

Sousa will be meeting with businesses and stakeholders across the province to hear their concerns heading into the budget process. He couldn't confirm when the budget will come down, but some pundits have suggested it should be sometime in April.

Today, Sousa will be in Mississauga to meet with Peel businesses and groups for pre-budget consultations.

However, PC Leader Tim Hudak wasn't enamoured with what he heard in the speech.

"Regrettably for Ontario, Premier Wynne appears to have chosen to entrench the McGuinty agenda that led Ontario to the biggest jobs and debt crisis of our lifetime," said Hudak in a release. "The only way to end our jobs and debt crisis, to take us off the wrong track, to change the direction of the province, is to change the team that leads it."

While the PCs aren't supportive of the speech, the NDP seemed slightly more amenable. Party Leader Andrea Howarth indicated they'll wait and see what's included in the budget.

"Families are feeling squeezed by

tough times," said Howarth in a release. "They want government action that creates jobs, improves healthcare and makes life affordable while we balance the books. This throne speech has a lot of promising talk, but unless we see action (in) the coming budget, we won't be able to support it."

Infrastructure funding and transportation improvements were also mentioned by Wynne following the speech. She talked about how "revenue tools" need to be implemented to raise the funds, without mentioning specifically what she thought they might be.

Sousa said the speech sent out the "right signals." He said its focus on shorter-term issues, such as debt and deficit, as well as longer-term ideas such as restraining spending to reduce Ontario's debt-to-GDP ratio, were appropriate.

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