

**Speaking Notes on Bill 162: Budget Measures Act, 2009  
to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic  
Affairs**

**May 7, 2009**

**The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario  
(RNAO)**

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Good afternoon. My name is David McNeil. I am a registered nurse and the President-Elect of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. RNAO is the professional organization representing registered nurses who practise in all roles and sectors across this province. Our mandate is to advocate for healthy public policy and for the role of registered nurses in enhancing the health of all Ontarians.

We welcome this opportunity to present our recommendations to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on Bill 162, the Budget Measures Act, 2009.

Both the 2009 Budget and Bill 162 are set against the backdrop of economic storm-clouds that continue to cast a dark shadow over Ontario communities. Thousands of families across the province have been stricken by layoffs, dwindling savings and lost pensions. Ontario's registered nurses know that it is exactly in these challenging times when individuals, families, and

communities are hurting across the province that bold leadership is needed to invest in what will make a difference.

RNAO agrees with the need to finance an economic recovery strategy through a higher deficit. We are concerned, however, with the \$4.5 billion in business tax cuts that are likely to have a greater structural effect on Ontario's budget. The government of Ontario should reject tax cuts in order to ensure ongoing fiscal capacity to deliver essential health, social, and environmental programs.

RNAO has ten recommendations to strengthen our province which are explained in detail within our written submission but I would like to emphasize a few key themes in these oral remarks.

Hard economic times erode people's health and increase pressure on the health care system. Nursing shortages threaten patient safety and impede the delivery of efficient, high-quality health care services with optimal health outcomes. A strong nursing workforce that would support a robust surge capacity in the health care system takes on added urgency in the current context of the H1N1 influenza outbreak. Essential health system transformation also requires improved access to registered nurses in

community health settings. Especially in these challenging times, the government must get back on track with its election commitment to hire 9,000 additional nurses by hiring a minimum of 3,000 additional nurses in fiscal year 2009-2010. .

The government should proceed urgently with funding 22 additional Nurse Practitioner-led clinics towards honouring the commitment to a total of 25 additional NP-led clinics by 2011. Three NP-led clinics are already underway in Thunder Bay, Belle River and Sault Ste. Marie. In the face of a flu pandemic threat added to the existing need to enhance access to primary care, we strongly recommend fast-tracking this commitment to deliver all remaining 22 NP-led clinics this year. Priority is also needed to fund 150 additional primary health care nurse practitioner positions across community health centres, NP-led clinics, family health teams, emergency departments, nursing homes and other outpatient settings.

While infrastructure projects in health care are needed, it is time to recognize that the private-financing for-profit model of procurement is fundamentally flawed as providing inferior value with increased cost. Amend Bill 162 to require public financing and operation of health infrastructure projects. In

the meantime, the government should establish an immediate and indefinite province-wide moratorium on Infrastructure Ontario's private-finance for-profit AFP projects in the hospital sector.

RNAO appreciates the progress that has been made with the release of *Breaking the Cycle—Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy* in December 2008 and the unanimous consent to third and final reading of Bill 152, the *Poverty Reduction Act* yesterday as a strong start to building a stronger, healthier, more inclusive society. The accelerated phase-in of the Ontario Child Benefit by two years, a 2 per cent increase in social assistance rates, and provincial funding to match federal new housing infrastructure initiatives are welcome news in the Budget. We need to do more, however, for vulnerable members in our community and so we urge that the minimum wage should be raised to \$10.25 an hour immediately, with annual increases indexed to the cost of living. Multi-year, sustainable funding should be dedicated to the poverty reduction strategy to ensure measurable progress to improve the economic and social conditions of persons living in poverty. This includes increasing, in a substantive way, social assistance rates so that all Ontarians can live in health and dignity. An immediate introduction of a

\$100 per month Healthy Food Supplement is a step towards addressing the gap between dangerously low assistance rates and nutritional requirements.

The government's economic recovery budget makes good headway on improving environmental health. The green energy and conservation initiatives are very significant, and cosmetic pesticide ban is world class. RNAO recommends that the government accelerate conservation and renewable energy efforts, and terminate expenditure on new nuclear power and refurbishment of Ontario Power Generation's Darlington and Pickering B sites due to high cost, lengthy construction delays and public safety concerns about radiation leaks and storage of dangerous waste. We also recommend that adequate funding for the early and effective implementation of the *Toxic Reduction Act, 2009* and regulations be ensured.

RNAO remains concerned that TILMA, NAFTA and other such trade agreements shift power to investors who can, under these agreements, sue the government when they think their profits are affected. These agreements effectively serve as tools for deregulation and can endanger the public's health. RNAO recommends that Bill 162 be amended to ensure all inter-provincial trade and investment agreements are subject to public

consultation and scrutiny, include strong protections for health care, environment, human rights and labour standards, and do not restrict federal, provincial or municipal governments' ability to regulate in the public interest.

We would like to extend our thanks to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs for the opportunity to provide these recommendations that we hope will help realize the vision of a healthy and prosperous Ontario.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David McNeil". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and "M".

David McNeil, RN, BScN, MHA

RNAO President-Elect