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Ontario Legislature returns with Speech from the Throne

The Government of Ontario unveiled a new five-year plan called 'Open Ontario' in a Speech from the Throne delivered by The Honourable David Onley, Ontario's Lieutenant Governor. The speech opened the second session of the province's 39th parliament.

The government will introduce a new Water Opportunities Act, designed to take advantage of the province's expertise in clean-water technology. Ontario companies already employ 22,000 in a growing sector that's worth \$400 billion (US) annually.

Ontario's colleges and universities will also play a key role in the five-year Open Ontario Plan, starting with the addition of 20,000 students this year. The plan also targets e-Learning with a new Ontario Online Institute, which will give students access to the best professors in top university programs from their home computers.

The plan also looks to capitalize on northwestern Ontario's deposit of chromite – said to be one of the largest deposits in the world and a key ingredient in stainless steel. The government will work with northerners and Aboriginal communities to take advantage of the find and continue to protect half of the northern Boreal Forest.

And as health care costs continue to rise, Ontario will introduce new legislation to improve accountability in our publicly funded health care system. The government will improve services for patients by encouraging health care professionals to work together.

The throne speech does not highlight any new policies regarding the housing industry or announce new help for homebuyers and sellers who must pay the soon to be introduced Harmonized Sales Tax (HST).

The Government of Ontario will also announce its 2010 provincial budget on March 25. OREA will be attending a budget lockup and providing analysis on what the budget means for REALTORS® and real estate.

For more information click [here](#).

To read OREA's 2009 budget analysis click [here](#).



REALTORS®: Remember to sign up for EI Benefits! Deadline is April 1

The federal government recently provided self-employed REALTORS® with the option to participate in the Employment Insurance (EI) program, with access to maternity, parental, sickness and compassionate care benefits.

REALTORS® only have until April 1st to take advantage of a special one-time start-up measure, which makes them eligible to collect benefits as early as January 1, 2011. Normally, self-employed Canadians need to wait 12 months before making a claim for EI benefits.

Should you wish to participate in the new EI program, you must register online using [My Service Canada Account](#) or by visiting a [Service Canada Centre](#).

For more details on the EI program for the self-employed please click [here](#) or call the EI Telephone Information Service at 1-800-206-7218.

We also invite you to view CREA's recent podcast with the Minister responsible for EI, Diane Finley. Associate Director of External Relations, David Salvatore, sat down with her to discuss how REALTORS® can benefit from the government's new program. Click [here](#) to view the podcast.

Housing activity stronger in 2010



Housing starts rebounded in the second half of 2009 and will strengthen in 2010, according to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) first quarter Housing Market Outlook, Canada Edition.

Following a total of 149,081 units in 2009, housing starts are expected to be in the range of 152,000 to 189,300 units in 2010, with a point forecast of 171,250 units. In 2011, housing starts will be in the range of 156,400 to 205,600 units, with a point forecast of 175,150 units.

The CMHC report also noted that the existing home market has shifted from a buyers' market, at the beginning of 2009, to a sellers' market. The relative lack of new listings for existing homes has pushed some of the demand into the new home market, which helps explain the forecast for higher housing starts activity in 2010.

The strong pace of MLS® sales seen in the second to fourth quarters of 2009 reflects, in part, activity that was delayed in the previous two quarters. The pace is not likely to be sustained as pent-up demand is exhausted and financing costs increase with anticipated higher interest rates later in 2010. As a result, existing home sales will be in the range of 455,350 to 509,900 units in 2010, with a forecast of 486,700 units, and then move slightly lower in 2011 to be in the range of 426,300 to 494,600 units, with a forecast of 469,950 units.

For more information click [here](#).

Government of Ontario celebrates fifth anniversary of Greenbelt

Toronto's Don and Humber River Valleys could soon be permanently protected as part of the Greenbelt.

With the Greenbelt celebrating its fifth anniversary in February, Toronto City Council unanimously declared its intention to apply to expand the Greenbelt in Toronto beyond the current Rouge River Park. The proposed additions run through some of Canada's most densely populated urban areas.

Ontario's Greenbelt Plan recognizes the importance of the Don and Humber River Valleys as key watersheds that connect the Greenbelt to the Great Lakes. Adding these river valleys to the Greenbelt would ensure their permanent protection.

Growing the Greenbelt is part of Ontario's plan to protect the environment and develop a prosperous sustainable economy.

For more information click [here](#).

Canada and Ontario announce energy efficient upgrades for affordable housing

The Government of Ontario and the Government of Canada have announced the creation of the Renewable Energy Initiative. The initiative is a first step in a program which allocates \$70 million for energy efficiency upgrades of existing social and new affordable housing projects. Announcements will be made this spring on requests for quotations from suppliers and on the application process so that organizations can apply for funding.

The new initiative will support the purchase and installation of renewable energy systems in existing and new affordable housing that are capable of generating energy and selling surplus energy back into the electrical grid.

The funding for today's announcement is part of a joint investment of more than \$1.2 billion over two years through an amendment to the Canada – Ontario Affordable Housing Program Agreement which was announced in June 2009.

For more information click [here](#).

Two new MPPs going to Queen's Park after provincial by-elections

Voters in Leeds-Grenville and Ottawa-West Nepean went to the polls on March 4th in provincial by-elections to replace outgoing MPPs Bob Runicman and Jim Watson. A 30-year veteran of Queen's Park, Runicman stepped down as MPP after getting appointed to the Senate while Watson stepped down to run for Mayor of Ottawa.

Steve Clark, the Progressive Conservative (PC) candidate in Leeds-Grenville, won 66 per cent of the vote handily retaining the seat for his party. Liberal candidate Bob Chiarelli hung on in Ottawa West-Nepean, narrowly beating PC candidate Beth Graham.

For by-election results click [here](#).

Brownfields expert presents to Ontario Commercial Federation

Brownfields expert Harry Dahme LLP of the Toronto law firm Gowlings Lawfleur Henderson recently presented to OREA's Ontario Commercial Federation on changes to brownfield regulation 153/04. Regulation 153/04 is an important regulatory standard for brownfield development.

The changes proposed by the government to the site condition standards under regulation 153/04 will result in an increased number of properties being identified as "contaminated." This will include not only industrial and commercial properties but also residential properties, potentially having a significant detrimental impact on property values.

OREA prepared a submission on the proposed changes to regulation 153/04 urging the government to conduct an assessment on the impact of the regulatory changes on the economy and on the real estate market.

To review OREA's submission on the proposed changes to Ontario regulation 153/04 click [here](#).

To read the amendments to Ontario regulation 153/04 click [here](#).