



POLICY BRIEF

June 2022

POST-ELECTION POLICY BRIEF: GETTING-IT-DONE

One of us considers themselves to be a decent squash player – a game best described as being like playing chess with a heart-rate of 180 beats per minute. It's a [hard game](#) that requires lots of skill, and just as importantly, focus. And when inevitably that focus fades inside the intensity and confusion of a very fast game (see 180b/m) success requires a return to the fundamentals: good foot work, hit your targets, WATCH THE BALL!



Photo credit: PSA World Tour

It's an apt analogy to the landscape confronting the re-elected Ford government.

With Friday's swearing in of the refreshed cabinet, the Ford Government is transitioning from campaigning to governing – two very different propositions. The task at hand then is how to translate the electoral mandate into a governing agenda and ensure the right ingredients are in place to Get-it-Done.

The agenda is clear – build Ontario for post-pandemic prosperity. And Get-It-Done is the operating mission. But coupled with the extraordinary headwinds facing governments around the world, the Get-It-Done phenomenon, an outgrowth the Yes Express, will undoubtedly need to find focus and capacity – and, as in our squash analogy, that inevitably means a return to the fundamentals: creating the right conditions for success; finding the talent and processes to make things happen; managing the politics of inevitable disappointment and unleashing the ingenuity and creativity of the province's vast stores of talent and entrepreneurship.

Building things requires the machinery of government to be efficient and smart – the opposite of the slow, seemingly outcome-agnostic processes that often tests the patience of most anyone dealing with government. When an irresistible force (a majority government with a

clear mandate and agenda) meets an immovable object (government inertia) the smart money always bets on the immovable object.

Ontario's first post-COVID-19 government is riding the "Yes Express" quickly into a traffic jam – attempting to address a complex host of challenges without the requisite governance relationships, culture and structures for getting anything done over the next couple of years (let alone at the speed of business). The external-to-government headwinds (the end of zero cost money, stagflation, labour markets and supply chain disruption) are obvious. Less obvious but equally difficult are the current governmental structures that are often antagonistic, or at least stand-off'ish towards expedited activity. This coupled with an institutional culture that offers external stakeholders (everything from excessive confidentiality to pro-forma "consultations") precious little opportunity to partner with governments to address the complex and multiple challenges in the current environment.

Outside the government's control is the need for a whole host of other players – municipalities, stakeholders, businesses – to up their game as well. This will also be necessary if the build agenda is really to get done. However, and in addition to this difficult but necessary pivot, the business climate is on the precipice.

As we pen this brief Ontario's official inflation rate is over 7% - many consumers will tell you that real inflation is significantly higher. Uncertain markets, rising costs, battered supply chains and impossible labour markets are challenging the viability of businesses in many sectors, particularly those with pandemic exhausted reserves. Businesses that hung on through endless COVID-19 closures now face rising interest costs that further erodes their bottom line. As one seasoned business owner recently told us, this is no longer about growth – it's about survival. There will be little patience for government decisions or programs that divert attention from the immediate-term struggle to

survive and no room for more regulatory or tax burden. Welcome to governing in 2022. So, what's a government to do? There are many things the government will need to do but from our perspective there are at least two key fundamentals:

The **first** is a familiar one – finding focus and making progress on the priorities that matter most. If everything is a priority, then nothing is, particularly in government. A government that prides itself on popularity could have an inherent problem focusing on a limited number of important files central to the governing agenda – particularly with the inevitable politics of disappointment that will come with the need to say no (and "no" can come in many guises: we would point, for example, to the old wisdom that "yes" plus "but" equals "no" ($y+b=n$)). So the "Yes Express" will need to develop something of a schedule of priorities to ensure some ability to create priorities and focus.

The **second** is finding the structural and talent capacity to think and act differently (different being a precursor of better). The government is going to have to not only identify the good ideas (big and small) that it needs to prioritize in order to accomplish its agenda but at the same time put the resources behind those priorities to make them work.

As the institution of government is a slow moving ship, in the immediate term that means finding the right work arounds. In practice this requires more creative and active governing, at least on the important files, and there is a certain amount of risk entailed in that approach. This means creating the necessary conditions, structures, and relationships to bring a new (and better) way of getting things done. It also means finding the capacity and discipline to deal with the necessary and unnecessary distractions inherent in governing (we see you public sector collective bargaining).

If history is a guide, changing relationships and partnerships is a key to this effort. Meeting the post-pandemic challenges will require new and different relationships with leaders in key stakeholder groups willing to push past pre-pandemic structural and cultural inertia. Accordingly, we would see the identification, support and development of capable partners as a critical tool in bringing the government's agenda to life.

As the government begins to move on its agenda, we are keen to see priorities come to life. A few key files would seem to be on any priority short-list – and as our list below makes clear, progress on each will require new ways of acting and a serious need to find capable partners for development and execution.

- 1. Energy** – the long-term challenges of clean, accessible and affordable energy in the province are well [documented](#). The success of the future requires the government to start putting the right pieces in place now.
- 2. Housing and infrastructure** – the [tensions](#) between the acute need for new housing and supporting infrastructure against the real concerns about development patterns (i.e. sprawl) are complex. The need for action is clear – the inertia extraordinary. In addition, municipalities will be a critical partner if progress is going to be made – and the path for necessary progress borders on the [impossible](#). This file this will test both the capacity and the relationships of all levels of government.
- 3. Business climate** – the province has limited policy levers to make any significant near-term mitigation of the terrifying economic headwinds. Nevertheless, the Ford Government can help build confidence for a better future and can make a start by not making things worse – this means perhaps holding off on changes that would only exacerbate the headaches and anxieties of businesses right now; that is to say some immediate term pauses, relieves

and breaks to help businesses survive. In the longer-term taking a hard look at innovation and productivity in the province will be key to any economic growth strategy and sustainable prosperity. We would add the need to consider more [strategic approaches](#) to key sectors such as health, manufacturing (including agri-food) and energy.

THE TAKEAWAY – YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE

The Ford government has achieved an extraordinary election victory that left their political rivals in a prolonged state of disrepair – there will be little opposition at Queen's Park for the foreseeable future. But, transitioning Get-It-Done from a bumper sticker to an agenda for action requires a senior level understanding of the internal and external forces perfectly designed to thwart, stall, and frustrate growth and change.

To be clear, the forces that protect the status quo existed long before the pandemic. But government's natural inclination to marginally improve in order to avoid substantive change was illuminated during the COVID-19 era as was the disconnect between the public and private sector.

Moving forward requires change; and, change obviously requires something more than the status-quo that the big institution of government can provide – at least in the near-term.

But, as in any challenging situation – on the squash court or governing the province – a return to the fundamentals is the best place to find the success that we all want and need. Embracing the challenge and adopting new strategies is the key to moving forward. While the smart money will always be on the forces that resist change, the Ford government has an opportunity to put the province on a path that makes building better possible.