

SUDBURY BY-ELECTION FUROR STILL STRONG FOR A FOURTH CONSECUTIVE WEEK

Once again, the opposition parties spent this past week in Question Period focused on the fallout from Premier Kathleen Wynne's appointment of former Federal NDP MP Glenn Thibeault as the Provincial Liberal candidate in the February 5 Sudbury by-election. Both the PCs and NDP continued hurling accusations of malfeasance at Premier Wynne. Both opposition parties attacked Wynne for having not yet scheduled a meeting with the Ontario Provincial Police. NDP Leader Andrea Horwath (Hamilton Centre) even offered advice to the Liberals on how to get in touch with the OPP by [saying](#): "You can call that number and you can ask for the corruption branch of the anti-rackets squad. You can tell them your name and the name of the Premier. They'll know who you are, however. After four investigations—trust me—they'll know who you are."

PC House Leader Steve Clark (Leeds-Grenville) took direct aim at the Premier's refusal to have her Deputy Chief of Staff step aside during the investigation. Referring to the executive of the Ontario Provincial Police Union leadership stepping aside for a RCMP investigation, he [added](#), "Why is it that the individuals who represent our police know to step aside when under investigation but the Premier's staff does not?"

While many in the Legislature, particularly the press gallery, seem exhausted by the PC and NDP concentration on this issue, the opposition parties do not look like they are in any hurry to move beyond it yet.

MINISTRY OF TRAINING, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES TO LAUNCH FUNDING FORMULA REVIEW

The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, Reza Moridi (Richmond Hill) [announced](#) that Ontario will launch consultations on reviewing the funding formula for postsecondary education. Moridi said that the consultations will concentrate on four areas:

- Enhanced quality and improving the overall student experience
- Support for the existing differentiation process, which is expressed in each university's Strategic Mandate Agreement
- Financial sustainability and long-term sustainability of the postsecondary sector
- Increased transparency and accountability

Moridi added that the open, formal and transparent consultations, starting in spring 2015, will include students, university leadership and faculty, as well as important partners such as employers, colleges, the elementary and secondary sector, and professional associations.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

In recognition of International Women's Day, all three parties made [statements](#) in the Legislature recognizing the importance of the day. Premier Kathleen Wynne lauded her government's work on behalf of women and commented on the recent introduction of her plan to stop sexual violence and harassment. Wynne said, "Last Friday our government launched It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment. The plan will raise public awareness of sexual violence and harassment in Ontario. It will help survivors so that they're better supported when they reach out for the help that they need. It will strengthen our laws to help ensure that workplaces are free from sexual violence and harassment. Above all, it will challenge the deep-rooted attitudes and behaviours that contribute to sexual violence and harassment in the first place—I'm talking about misogyny and how it is never okay."

PC MPP Laurie Scott (Kawartha-Haliburton-Brock) spoke on behalf of her party about sexual violence and harassment against women. Scott said, "However, with every shining light there are unfortunately shadows of darkness. It is impossible to discuss International Women's Day and the status of women without acknowledging one of the most hideous scars on our society. Of course I'm referring to the ongoing sexual violence and harassment against women." Speaking on behalf of the NDP, party leader Andrea Horwath also spoke to the issue by saying, "This was a year where women refused to stay silent in the face of rape, harassment and assault. We must thank those women for their courage and take pride in the public discourse that it has spurred. As women, we must continue to take up our space, to continue to stand up and speak with our equal voices proudly, anywhere, anytime."

THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT SETS HEARING DATES

The Ontario Legislature's Select Committee on Violence and Sexual Harassment will begin public [hearings](#) in Toronto on March 25 and continue with province-wide consultations in April and May in various locations across the province. The committee will accept written submissions and will also allow presenters to meet privately with the committee.

ELECTIONS ONTARIO RECOMMENDING CHANGES TO ELECTION LAWS

In his report on the 2014 election, Chief Electoral Officer Greg Essensa, makes a number of recommendations in advance of the next scheduled election in 2018. In his [press release](#), Essensa highlights three main areas including:

- Establish a single address authority to help improve the accuracy of the voter's list.
- Level the playing field by strengthening the regulations on third party advertising.
- Plan for the future by creating consistent standards to evaluate the integration of technologies into the electoral process.

In his [report](#), Essensa highlighted the growing influence of third party advertising from the 2007 to the 2014 election. He said, "By 2014 spending by third parties had increased by over 400 per cent for a total of \$8.4million. This lack of regulation is creating an uneven playing field that can potentially influence electoral outcomes."

Some of the other key recommendations included incorporating technology into the voting process, holding elections on school holidays and moving fixed-date elections from fall to spring, Essensa believes that by holding elections on school holidays (Saturday, Sundays and statutory holidays), voter turnout and the availability of schools will be increased. He also suggests moving elections from October to June. He says that October already has municipal elections at that time and that could cause voter fatigue and a drop in voter participation. Finally, Essensa said that the 2014 election cost \$77,872,422, about \$13 million less than estimated.

CATHOLIC EDUCATION LOBBY DAY AT QUEEN'S PARK

Representatives from the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association and the Catholic Church held a lobby day and reception at Queen's Park to lobby MPPs on a variety of issues including the continuation of publicly-funded Catholic Education. About 30 MPPs met with various officials including the Catholic Church's Cardinal Collins.

NDP MPP INTRODUCES AFFIRMING SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY BILL

NDP MPP Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale—High Park) introduced a bill entitled the [Affirming Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Act](#).

DiNovo's bill would protect youth from therapy aimed at preventing them from growing up to be LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual or queer). DiNovo [says](#) her bill would prevent any attempt to change or direct the sexual orientation or the gender identity of patients and prohibits such efforts from being an insured service covered by OHIP. The bill would also prohibit such efforts from being carried out as part of health care services to patients under 18 years of age and makes it an offence to do so.

In response, Health Minister Eric Hoskins (St. Paul's) [said](#) such therapy is already prohibited by anti-discrimination provisions in the Ontario Human Rights Code. And, he added that OHIP has no specific billing code for conversion therapy either. At the same time, he praised DiNovo for the bill and said that he hoped to have an opportunity to work with DiNovo on the bill.