

## LIBERALS AND TORIES SPAR OVER DIRECTION OF PROVINCIAL DEFICIT

Finance Minister Charles Sousa (Mississauga South) [announced](#) the province's deficit for 2014-15 is \$10.9 billion, \$1.6 billion below its target of \$12.5 billion. Sousa added that these figures confirm that the Liberals are on track to balance the budget by 2017-18. In contrast, Progressive Conservative Finance critic, Vic Fedeli (Nipissing), said that since Kathleen Wynne became Premier two years ago, Ontario's deficit has increased from \$9.2 billion to \$10.9 billion. Fedeli disputed Sousa's claim that Ontario would balance its budget by 2017-18. Fedeli [added](#), "Expert after expert, from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, to the Moody's and Fitch credit rating agencies to the Auditor have all told the Liberals they must change course. So far, we have no evidence they're willing to do that."

Meantime, Sousa has yet to announce the date for the Ontario budget. With the announcement that the Federal government's budget will be presented on April 21, it is expected that the Ontario budget will be announced shortly afterwards.

## 2014 PUBLIC SECTOR SALARY DISCLOSURE LIST RELEASED

For the first time in recent memory, the release of the [Public Sector Salary Disclosure \(2014\)](#) list (Sunshine List) did not dominate the Legislature. In fact, not one question was asked by the opposition parties on the number of public sector employees on the 2014 disclosure list. This year's list revealed that the number of public sector employees making in excess of \$100,000 topped 100,000 employees for a total of over 111,000. [Media](#) reported that today's \$100,000 threshold, first introduced in 1996 by the Mike Harris PC government, if inflation-adjusted to 2014, would have actually meant a current salary of \$145,000. In that case, about 19,000 public sector employees would be on the list. But, of course, no politician is prepared to raise the threshold for fear of generating a political backlash.

While the opposition did not ask questions on the number of people on the list, the NDP did ask some questions on some of the highest earners on the list. The NDP Leader, Andrea Horwath concentrated on [demanding](#) that the government cap public sector CEO salaries. Deputy Premier, Deb Matthews (London Centre) said that the recently passed [Bill 8 Public Sector and MPP Accountability and Transparency Act](#) included caps on executive compensation and added, "We are moving forward on executive compensation. We are being thoughtful about it and we are moving forward to collect the information, creating salary bands including hard caps. This work is under way now."

## **NDP CALLS FOR CHANGES TO UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE SENIOR ADMINISTRATORS' SALARY LIMITS**

With the release of the Sunshine List, it was revealed that the University of Western Ontario President was able to pocket twice his yearly salary in 2014 as a result of foregoing a year's administrator leave. By so doing, his salary doubled to almost \$1 Million. This garnered immediate attention and led NDP MPP Peggy Sattler (London West) to quickly propose the [Broader Public Sector Executive Compensation Act \(Senior Administrators of Universities and Colleges\)](#).

Her bill would prohibit senior administrators from collecting their leave allowance while at the same time earning their regular salary. The administrator would have to take one or the other but not both. In bringing her legislation forward Sattler [said](#), "University presidents are already among the highest-paid public sector employees. Double-salary deals, funded through public dollars and student tuition, are simply not acceptable—especially at a time when university budgets are being cut, Ontario postsecondary students are facing the highest tuition in the country, graduate students are being paid poverty wages, university class sizes are increasing, and more and more classes are being taught by contract faculty."

As a result of the firestorm, the University of Western President announced that he would voluntarily return the leave payment that he collected in 2014.

## **MINISTRY OF EDUCATION SEES RISING GRADUATION RATES**

Premier Kathleen Wynne (Don Valley West) and Education Minister Liz Sandals (Guelph) [said](#) that the province's high school graduation rate increased from 83% in 2013 to 84% in 2014. They added that this rate was up from 68% in 2004, the first full year of the Liberal government. As well, they announced that the percentage of students graduating in four years is 76%, up from 56% in 2004. The Liberals claim that their investment in the education system has seen 163,000 more students graduate than would have graduated had the rate remained at the 2004 level. Wynne added, "Education is central to the opportunity and security we are working to build in Ontario. Our rising provincial high school graduation rate highlights the strength of our public education system. With support from our educators and parents, we will continue to ensure students are graduating with the knowledge and skills they need to reach their full potential."

## **NDP MPP INTRODUCES BILLS TO HONOUR FORMER COLLEAGUE PETER KORMOS**

In recognition of the second anniversary of the passing of longtime Welland MPP Peter Kormos, Nickle Belt MPP, France Gelinas, proposed two bills that she says recognize the legacy of Kormos' advocacy. The first is [Bill 83, Labour Relations Amendment Act \(Strike and Lock-Out Information\)](#). The bill would require employers to provide information regarding the use of replacement workers in the event of a strike or lock-out to the Minister of Labour.

The second is [Bill 84, Trillium Gift of Life Network Amendment Act](#). The bill would no longer require the province to obtain consent organ donation. Instead, a person would have to object to the removal of the tissue prior to his or her death or a substitute could object on his or her behalf after the death has occurred. If an objection is made, no tissue would be removed from the body.

## **BILL 77, AFFIRMING SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY ACT PASSES 2ND READING**

MPP Cheri DiNovo's [Bill 77, Affirming Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Act](#), passed 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading in the Legislature with all-party support by a 52-0 vote. 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). Various MPPs stood to speak in support of the bill during the debate. NDP Leader Andrea Horwath (Hamilton Centre) [said](#), "We all know what a challenging time our own developmental years are. Imagine being told by your parents and by a doctor, a person of authority, that something you know about yourself fundamentally, something that you know truly to be who you are—imagine being told by those people that it is wrong, that what you believe about yourself and who you are is simply wrong and has to be fixed or changed. Imagine the damage that would cause to a young person."

Deputy PC Leader Christine Elliott (Whitby – Oshawa) also said, "Even though the American Psychiatric Association and the US National Association of Social Workers have long ago repudiated so-called conversion therapy, we have been confronted with the reality that this dubious practice still exists in Ontario today. Unfortunately, the price that is paid if we don't take action is far too great. Suicide rates among LGBT individuals are frighteningly high. Approximately 41% of people who are transgender or gender non-conforming have attempted suicide sometime in their lives."

As well, Premier Kathleen added, "Ensuring the protection and the rights of Ontario's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community is something that is very important to me, and it's important to our government. The concept of conversion therapy contrasts starkly with the fundamental values on which Ontario is built. It's so important that we make it clear that people have the right to be who they are in Ontario."

The bill has been referred to the Justice Policy committee. Dates for possible hearings will be set when the committee meets to review the legislation.

## **WYNNE OFFERS TO DROP LIBEL SUIT AGAINST TORY MPPS IF THEY APOLOGIZE**

A week after indicating that she [would](#) continue with her \$2 million libel suit against Tory MPPs Tim Hudak (Niagara West – Glanbrook) and Lisa MacLeod (Nepean – Carleton), Premier Wynne offered to drop her suit if the Tory MPPs apologized instead. The libel suit was initiated as Wynne's response to allegations from Hudak and MacLeod regarding her role in the Mississauga and Oakville gas plant relocations. In responding to new allegations by MacLeod that Wynne killed an anti-SLAPP bill because it would affect her attempt to muzzle the opposition, Wynne [said](#), "If the two members would just apologize, the whole thing would go away. That's all we're talking about. All I was concerned about was that there was a completely unfounded allegation. The accusations were made on the eve of an election. They were completely untrue; they were a complete fiction. All I'm saying is: Just apologize; retract those, and the whole thing goes away."

MacLeod [refused](#) Wynne's offer.

## **BROWN ADDS PROMINENT BACKERS IN PC LEADERSHIP CONTEST**

Ontario PC Leadership candidate and current Federal MP Patrick Brown (Barrie) has been endorsed by two prominent and well-connected Tories. Paul Godfrey, who has held numerous posts including President of the Toronto Blue Jays and CEO of Post Media, and Derek Burney, former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's Chief of Staff and once Canadian Ambassador to the United States have declared their support for Brown. In declaring for Brown, Godfrey [said](#), "This party in the past number of years has picked fights with labour, which aren't necessary. You can sit down and talk to them. You can differ with them. You can agree with them, but the fact is you have to talk to them."

With these endorsements, it seems that high-ranking Tories are becoming more comfortable with the prospect of a Brown leadership. This, of course, spells trouble for early front-runner, MPP Christine Elliott. Despite having the support of three-quarters of the 28 MPPs in the Ontario PC caucus, she trails Brown in membership recruitment numbers. Meanwhile, MPP Monte McNaughton (Lambton-Kent – Middlesex), the other candidate, trails behind the other two. Tories will participate in ranked ballot vote on May 3 and 7. The winner will be announced on May 9.