



OPPOSITION QUESTIONS GOVERNMENT ON OSSTF/FEESO LOCAL STRIKES

As OSSTF/FEESO members in the Rainbow District School Board became the second Federation local to strike, pressure on the government increased in the Legislature. Under continued questioning by both Opposition Education critics, NDP Lisa Gretzky (Windsor West) and PC Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North), Education Minister Liz Sandals (Guelph) continued to assert that the strikes were local and, as such, were outside her mandate. Neither opposition critic accepted Sandals' answers. Gretzky [said](#), "While this government continues to dodge responsibility for mishandling our educational sector, an estimated 26,000 students are missing class and 2,400 teachers are now on the picket line. With teachers on strike, students out of school and parents across Ontario wondering whether or not their high school seniors will be going off to college or university this fall, will the Premier finally take responsibility for her government's cuts to education?"

Sandals disputed Gretzky's assertion saying, "I must say the NDP is nothing if not persistent. They really do have trouble with the definition of the word "cut." So let me say once again, if you had \$22.5 billion in education funding last year, and you have \$22.5 billion in education funding this year, that is not a cut. That is stable funding—and less students, so it's actually more per student."

The day after Rainbow District started its local strike, Dunlop [added](#), "Minister, how many more boards need to strike before you show leadership and stop blaming local issues?" Sandals responded, "I'm not quite sure what the member thinks we can do other than negotiate, but what I do know is what their suggestion was. Their platform was that they were going to fire 100,000 public servants. When we did the math, that worked out to 22,700 workers in Ontario school boards. That was their platform. I don't think that would get you labour peace, firing 22,700 people. I actually think the way to get labour peace is to negotiate collective agreements. I also believe this is something that we need to do both locally—I understand that the boards are willing to be at the table—and centrally. I assure you that central negotiations continue."

As the week progressed, the Liberal government continued to say it was up to local school boards to conduct local bargaining. At the same time, local school boards kept referring the matter back to the central bargaining table claiming no local deal could be finalized before a central table agreement. At some point, the Liberals and school boards will need to stop pointing fingers at each other for the lack of progress in the talks.

TORIES SET TO CHOOSE NEW PARTY LEADER

With Tories set to vote for a new party Leader on May 3 and 7, the two remaining candidates—MPP Christine Elliott (Whitby – Oshawa) and Federal Conservative MP Patrick Brown (Barrie)—concluded the campaign with a [televised debate](#).

The two candidates have made determined efforts to distinguish themselves on a variety of issues including their approach to the recently revised Physical and Sexual Education curriculum. For example, while initially lending her support to parents fighting against the new curriculum, Elliott now attacks Brown for being against the revised curriculum. Brown has conceded that he would vote against the revised curriculum and feels that values should be taught by families. Elliott counters that Brown's stance would lose the party votes. Brown's relationship with social conservatives has been used to by Elliott to say that he cannot grow the party in urban centres. Brown has replied that the past approach of the Ontario PC party has not led to an urban breakthrough and that his outreach to new Canadians, Labour and other groups is the formula to success. He has said that he wants to emulate the approach of the Federal Conservative party in reaching new voters.

Brown's main appeal in the campaign is that he is new and different. He is not part of the losing PC party over the past few elections. He has no responsibility for their policies and actions. He claims he wants to grow the party's tent by attracting new groups but Elliott says Brown's social conservatism would deny the party that opportunity.

In countering Elliott, Brown says that Elliott wants to make the PC party "Liberal light" and not sufficiently conservative. Brown says that people will vote for the "authentic" party and not a pale imitation.

With the campaign winding down, Brown's ascendancy in the race has flummoxed many long-time provincial Tories. While more than half of Tory MPPs support Elliott and feel that a woman leader would be best for the party, they are astounded that Brown now remains her only challenger having vanquished three sitting MPPs from the contest. Brown's claim that he has 41,000 of the 76,000 voting members is no longer disputed. As Tories prepare to vote, with a winner announced on May 9, the apparent coronation of Christine Elliott is gravely in doubt. Whoever wins, the first challenge will be to pull the party together after a rancorous debate.

OPPOSITION PARTIES REPLY TO LIBERAL BUDGET

In her reply to the Ontario Liberal government's budget, New Democratic Party Leader Andrea Horwath (Hamilton – Centre) concentrated her criticisms on the proposed sell off of Hydro assets. She spoke passionately about the issue and also revealed that the NDP has launched a [petition](#) to stop the sell-off of Hydro to private interests. At the same time, Horwath also took issue with the general tone of the budget [saying](#), "After all the scandals, the misplaced priorities and the bad decisions, it is clear that Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals still do not know right from wrong. Instead of choosing to close tax loopholes for corporations, Kathleen Wynne is making Ontarians pay the price. This budget cuts education and closes schools. It cuts health care and fires nurses. It cuts poverty reduction programs. It sells off our hydro system to Bay Street and opens the door to more privatization in years to come."

Horwath continued her comments with an emphasis on education adding, "The Liberals have already cut \$250 million so far this year as they work towards cutting half a billion dollars from education. In addition, there will be a complete freeze on spending from 2016-18, while during this period, inflation is projected by their own admission to be about 2% each year. This means even

deeper cuts are on the horizon for education. Families, parents and students are already feeling the pinch, and they are seeing the results of all of this first-hand. They're watching as teachers and early childhood educators are being fired. Already, we have disrupted classrooms and students out of school, because these Liberal cuts are hurting education." She also chastised the Liberals for their plans on school closures by saying, "So five years down the road, we will be struggling to keep up with demand in these very same areas where the Liberals are now closing down schools. It is very, very short-sighted."

Horwath also said the Liberals were hurting post-secondary education, "The government is committing to three years of funding cuts to Ontario's universities and colleges. Three years of funding cuts is what's in that budget. High-quality post-secondary education is a big part of what gives Ontario an edge as a labour force on the world stage."

Meanwhile, Progressive Conservative Interim Leader, Jim Wilson (Simcoe – Grey) chose to attack the Liberals for wasting tax dollars on debt charges. He [said](#), "The Minister of Finance knows full well that the interest on the debt, tax dollars that the province literally throws down the drain, is over \$11 billion this year. It's growing at a rate of 5.4% every year; health care funding is only growing at 1.9%, by comparison. This year, education is even lower than that. Interest on the debt is the third-largest expense on the government's books and it's growing the fastest." The budget is currently at second reading and will soon move to committee for hearings. Unlike previous budgets in the minority parliament, this budget will pass without any opposition amendments in the Liberal majority parliament.

BILL 56, ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN ACT, TO BECOME LAW

One of the signature planks in the Liberals' successful re-election in 2014 was the proposal for an Ontario Retirement Pension Plan (ORPP). That promise was fulfilled this week as Liberal and NDP MPPs combined by a vote of 64–23 to pass the bill. It now awaits Royal Assent to become law. The ORPP will become effective January 1, 2017. The new ORPP is intended to supplement the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) for employees without a workplace pension plan. It does not affect those employees who have workplace pension plans such as OSSTF/FEESO members who are part of the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System or another workplace pension plan.

Liberal Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan), Mitzie Hunter (Scarborough – Guildwood), in proposing the legislation, concluded 3rd debate by [saying](#), "This bill is about securing our collective futures. It is about providing more certainty for the retirement futures of the people in this province. Once in place, the ORPP would help millions of Ontario workers retire with more financial security. And after a lifetime of contributing to the economy, we think people deserve a strong and secure retirement." The Progressive Conservatives expressed a number of concerns with the bill to create an ORPP. One of their main arguments is that the ORPP is a tax that will lead to job losses. In responding to Minister Hunter, PC MPP Toby Barrett (Haldimand – Norfolk) said, "It's a tax. It's a tax on employers; it's a tax on employees. It's the same kind of tax, essentially, as all of the other taxes."

While the Liberals hope to have the plan ready for implementation in January 2017, many believe that they are hoping that either a Federal NDP or Liberal government after this fall's, federal election will enhance CPP so that the ORPP becomes unnecessary. If that doesn't happen, the implementation of the ORPP will be a massive undertaking for the government. It would not be surprising to see the implementation date pushed back as the Liberals begin to acknowledge how difficult an undertaking it will be to start this pension plan anew.

PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM OPPONENTS MEET PREMIER WYNNE

With the Ministry of Education's long-awaited update to the Physical and Sexual Education Curriculum being announced for implementation for the 2015-16 school year, parents and groups opposing the update continued their fight to have it either abolished or amended. This week the Peel District School Board [urged](#) the Ministry of Education to communicate with parents about the proposed changes. In response, Premier Wynne met with opponents of the new curriculum but [said](#), protests, notwithstanding, that the curriculum will be implemented for the fall.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION ANNOUNCES 4,000 NEW CHILD CARE SPACES

As part of the 2015 budget, the Minister of Education Liz Sandals (Guelph) [said](#) that the Liberal government will invest \$120 million to create 4,000 new child care spaces over the next three years. The new child care spaces will be made available throughout the province.

THREE PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS PASS FINAL READING INCLUDING RYAN'S LAW (ENSURING ASTHMA FRIENDLY SCHOOLS)

As part of an agreement by all three political parties in the Legislature, one Private Members' bill from each caucus was fast-tracked through 3rd Reading and passed into law. The three bills passed include: Bill 17, Child Actor's Act; Bill 20, Ryan's Law; and Bill 28, Hispanic Heritage Month Act.

[Bill 17, Child Actor's Act](#) was promoted by NDP MPP Paul Miller (Hamilton East – Stoney Creek). In final debate, Miller [said](#) he proposed the bill because, "Child labour is illegal in Ontario, with one of the notable exceptions being the entertainment industry. Restrictions on working hours, the establishment of break periods and mandatory chaperoning are all measures in this bill that protect and enshrine respect for the child performer, both as a child and as a performer.

PC MPP Jeff Yurek's (Elgin – Middlesex – London) [Bill 20, Ryan's Law \(Ensuring Asthma Friendly Schools\)](#) was proposed as a result of the tragic death of [Ryan Gibbons](#), a London-area child, after suffering an asthma attack during recess. The child did not have his inhaler with him despite requests from his mother to the school. Yurek brought forth the bill to allow children, with parental or guardian permission, to carry their puffer with them. As well, the bill would require every school board to establish and maintain an asthma policy. Also, there would be a requirement that every school principal develop an individual plan for each pupil who has asthma and a requirement that every school principal maintain a file for each pupil with asthma. Finally, the bill would provide that

no action or other proceedings for damages shall be commenced against a board employee for an act or omission done or omitted in good faith.

The final bill passed as part the tri-partite agreement is MPP Cristina Martins' (Davenport) [Bill 28, Hispanic Heritage Month Act](#).

The Bill proclaims October as Hispanic Heritage Month.

COMMUNITY HUB CONSULTATIONS WEBSITE LAUNCHED

Premier Kathleen Wynne's Community Hub Framework Advisory Group launched a [website](#) this week seeking public input. The Premier tasked the advisory group to come up with ideas to promote community hubs. The group is mandated to look into partnerships amongst organizations and to review other jurisdictions practices in implementing community hubs.

LIBERALS WILL CONSIDER LIMITS TO THIRD-PARTY ADVERTISING AND DONATIONS

In the aftermath of the [report](#) of Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer calling for limits on third-party advertising, Deputy Premier Deb Matthews (London Centre) [said](#) that the Liberals will consider making changes to third-party advertising rules. At present, there are no legal limits to the amount of money third parties can spend on non-partisan election advertising. In making the case for limiting third-party advertising the Chief Electoral Officer, Greg Essensa, said that third-party advertising had increased, since the 2007 election, by over 400% in the 2014 election for a total of \$8.4 million. As well, he said that Ontario is the only jurisdiction in Canada without third-party spending limits.

NDP MPP CHERI DINOVO PROPOSES REPEAL OF SAFE STREETS ACT, 1999

NDP MPP Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale – High Park) introduced [Bill 94, Peter Kormos Act \(Repealing the Safe Streets Act\)](#), that aims to repeal the [1999 Safe Streets Act](#) introduced during the Mike Harris government. The 1999 Safe Streets Act was brought in by the Tories after a number of high-profile incidents in Toronto involving “squeegee kids” and panhandlers. Earlier this year, former Liberal Attorney-General Michael Bryant expressed [remorse](#) that he failed to repeal the Safe Streets Act. DiNovo's legislation would stop the prosecution of the poor that made it illegal to solicit money on streets, in parking lots, at transit stops or near bank machines.

BILL ON MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION AND SERVICES PROPOSED

NDP MPP Teresa Armstrong (London – Fanshawe) put forth [Bill 95, Mental Health and Addictions Services in Ontario Act](#).

Armstrong's bill would create a new umbrella organization to design, manage, and coordinate the mental health and addictions system and ensure that programs and services are delivered consistently and comprehensively across Ontario. Armstrong indicated that an all-party Select

Committee on Mental Health and Addictions made such recommendations in 2010 and to date they have not been acted upon.

PREMIER WYNNE MEETS ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE REGARDING SUDBURY BY-ELECTION ALLEGATIONS

After weeks of questions by the opposition parties as to when Premier Kathleen Wynne (Don Valley West) would meet with the Ontario Provincial Police over allegations of improper influence in the Liberal nomination process for the recent Sudbury by-election, Wynne finally met with the OPP. Wynne had promised to meet with the OPP prior to the end of April. Wynne has continued to maintain that no improper actions took place in the nomination process that saw former Federal NDP MP Glenn Thibeault become the successful Liberal candidate in the by-election.

MARINE MAMMAL PROTECTION LEGISLATION REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

[Bill 80](#), Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment Act, passed 2nd Reading with the combined support of the Liberals and NDP by a vote of 62–22. The bill is a [response](#) to reports of the mistreatment of mammals at private facilities such as Marineland in Niagara Falls. The bill will prohibit the possession and breeding of orcas in Ontario.

In opposing the bill, Progressive Conservative MPPs expressed concern for the economic benefits that attractions such as Marineland in Niagara Falls provide to the community. PC MPP Norm Miller (Parry Sound – Muskoka) [said](#), “Whatever new rules come out of this bill—obviously, we want to provide the best environment for marine mammals that are in captivity—I think it’s important that we also realize that in probably one of the biggest businesses that deals with marine mammals, Marineland at Niagara Falls, there are 700 people who rely on their jobs to put food on the table and help pay their ever-increasing hydro bills. I think that’s something the government should be taking into consideration as it brings forward Bill 80 for debate. That’s something we can’t lose sight of.”

The bill has now been referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy for hearings.