

## EDUCATION MINISTER HINTS AT FORCING STRIKING TEACHERS BACK TO WORK

After a bruising week in the Legislature, including calls for her resignation, Education Minister Liz Sandals revealed that a little-known government agency, the [Education Relations Commission](#), could be summoned to consider if the school year could be lost by the OSSTF/FEESO local strikes. If summoned, the Commission could recommend to the Lieutenant-Governor in Council on whether the strikes need to be suspended. Despite the Commission being under the mandate of the Ontario Labour Relations Board, the final decision would be made by the Minister of Education. If this were to happen, the Liberals would then need to introduce back-to-work legislation. And, with only one week remaining prior to the Victoria Day Constituency Week, the Liberals would be hard-pressed to pass this legislation prior to the beginning of June. Any back-to-work legislation would need to go through normal legislative procedures which would mean that it could take a minimum of six to eight legislative sitting days for it to pass.

Meanwhile, in the Legislature, both opposition parties continued to attack the Liberals on their approach to the teachers' strikes. The NDP's Education critic, Lisa Gretzky (Windsor-West) accused the Liberals of chronically underfunding education. Gretzky asked, "Will the Premier finally admit that more than a decade of this government's chronic underfunding of education and flip-flopping on class caps are forcing students and families to pay the price?"

Gretzky [added](#), "In response to labour action forced by these overwhelming cuts, the Premier and her government have taken to the blame game, saying teachers wanted to go on strike. Will this government stop blaming everyone but themselves and finally take responsibility for creating chaos in our schools?"

Education Minister Liz Sandals (Guelph) responded by saying, "I just want to be absolutely clear. Education funding last year: \$22.5 billion. Education funding this year: \$22.5 billion. Special education funding has not been cut. So the accusations are just simply inaccurate."

PC Education critic, Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North), accused Sandals of not doing enough to end the strikes. He said, "Minister, you've said that you were perplexed, mystified and had no idea why these boards were striking. Then you blamed the strikes on local issues time and time again. That's a story that no one is buying anymore. Now, you say kids aren't in the classroom because teachers have a "general desire to strike." The other side of the table is dumbfounded by your remarks. Minister, it's your job to know why these boards are striking and it's your job to get these students the education that they deserve. Because of your inaction, will you resign before you cost these students the rest of their school year?"

In response, Sandals [said](#), “What I will say to the students is that we know that the only way to resolve this is to get to the table and negotiate. We remain absolutely committed to negotiating a collective agreement because that’s the way we can make sure that every student, regardless of whether they’re an elementary or secondary student, is back in the classroom.”

As another week ended, the Liberals were united in their insistence that they were committed to the negotiations process and would not bring forward back-to-work legislation.

### **PATRICK BROWN EASILY CAPTURES ONTARIO PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP**

The Ontario Progressive Conservative Party experienced a hostile takeover with the election of Federal Conservative MP Patrick Brown as their new leader. A backbench Barrie-area MP, Brown, who first won election as a Stephen Harper Conservative in 2006, has never served as a Cabinet Minister or Parliamentary Secretary in Harper’s government. Despite being cast as a political lightweight when he entered the leadership race, Brown first vanquished three sitting MPPs including Lisa MacLeod (Nepean – Carleton), Vic Fedeli (Nipissing) and Monte McNaughton (Lambton – Kent – Middlesex). All three withdrew from the race earlier. He then easily bested his only remaining competitor, provincial Deputy Leader Christine Elliott (Whitby – Oshawa), by winning more than 60% of the electoral votes.

Despite enjoying the support of 18 of the 28 member PC caucus, Elliott, the provincial party establishment candidate, never grew her campaign to match Brown’s aggressive recruitment of new members. Of the 107 ridings, she only won 23 while Brown captured 83 (one tied). As well, only half of her caucus endorsers were able to deliver their ridings to Elliott. The loss was a political humiliation for Elliott.

While many political pundits were quick to dismiss Brown as an out-of-touch social conservative who is anti-abortion, anti-same sex marriage and anti-sex education curriculum, Brown’s impressive political organizational skills should not be dismissed as easily. While Brown ran a campaign devoid of the articulation of political policies, save for his opposition to the updated sex education curriculum, his concentration on membership sales and intense work ethic make him a candidate not to be easily dismissed.

Having learned from the Federal Conservative formula for attracting newer Canadians to his political tent, Brown also garnered strong support from all parts of the province. If he can continue to make inroads with newer Canadians, Brown may be able to cut into traditional Liberal support, just like the Federal Conservatives did. As well, Brown’s lack of known policies make him a blank slate in many ways. While many may say that that is a weakness, it can also be said to be a potential strength. Brown will have three years to travel the province and meet with voters. This should give him an opportunity to also develop policies that will better reflect voters’ desires.

Whatever happens in the next three years prior to the 2018 election, it is always dangerous to dismiss political opponents. Many Premiers including David Peterson, Mike Harris, Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne were dismissed when they won their party’s leadership. When party leaders are

disrespectfully dismissed, it is easy to ignore them. And ignoring political leaders is never a good idea for they can rise to power more easily that way. Vigilance is necessary, especially when the new provincial Tory leader is an acolyte of Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

### **TORIES PROPOSE LIMITS ON THIRD-PARTY ADVERTISING**

A week after Liberal Deputy Premier Deb Matthews (London North Centre) publicly mused about limits to third-party advertising, PC MPP Bill Walker (Bruce – Grey – Owen Sound) proposed [Bill 96, Special Interest Group Election Advertising Transparency Act](#).

Walker's private members bill would limit third-party election spending at \$150,000. If passed, Walker's bill would bring Ontario into line with other jurisdictions in Canada. But, the likelihood of his private members bill passing is remote. If any third-party advertising legislation were to be passed, it would most certainly be through a bill brought forward by the Liberal government.

### **NDP BILL ON MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS SERVICES MOVES TO COMMITTEE**

NDP MPP Teresa Armstrong's (London Fanshawe) [Bill 95, Improving Mental Health and Addiction Services in Ontario](#) passed 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading and was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy for review. Armstrong's bill would allow the Mental Health and Addictions Leadership Advisory Council to continue its work. The bill would also expand the purview of the Ontario Ombudsman to allow investigations into mental health and addiction service providers.

### **NDP SEEKS TO EXPAND PROTECTION FOR VICTIMS OF OCCUPATIONAL DISEASES**

NDP MPP Jennifer French (Oshawa) introduced [Bill 98, Protecting Victims of Occupational Disease Act](#).

French says that her bill would close a loophole in the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act that allows victims of occupational disease and their spouses to be denied loss of earnings and survivor benefits. French added that her bill would reinstate loss of earnings benefits for workers diagnosed with occupational diseases after retirement, and will eliminate a technicality in the act that allows their surviving spouses' benefits to be drastically reduced. French concluded by [saying](#), "The government has acknowledged that this is an issue that needs to be addressed but there have been four Ministers of Labour since that acknowledgement was made and there is still no resolution." French's bill was given 1<sup>st</sup> Reading.

### **ANTI-FRACKING BILL PASSES 2<sup>ND</sup> READING AND MOVES TO COMMITTEE**

NDP MPP Peter Tabuns' (Toronto Danforth) [Bill 82, Oil and Salt Resources Amendment Act \(Anti-Fracking\)](#) passed 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading by a vote of 29 – 18. Although the Liberals had initially expressed opposition to the bill because there are no current applications for fracking in Ontario, they nonetheless followed the lead of their former Environment Minister, Jim Bradley (St. Catharines) in supporting Tabuns' bill. During the debate, Bradley [said](#), "I will be voting in favour of the bill that's before the House. Anybody who has had the position of Minister of the Environment where it was a

serious position in the government could not possibly do anything other than vote in favour of this particular bill.”

The current Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Glen Murray (Toronto Centre) also voted in favour of the bill. The bill has now been referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

### **VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT ACT FOR PUBLIC SECTOR HIRING INTRODUCED**

Interim PC Leader Jim Wilson (Simcoe – Grey) introduced [Bill 97, Veteran's Employment Act](#).

The bill would amend the Public Sector Employment Act to give military veterans priority in public sector hiring. While the bill would give preference to military veterans, Wilson said that they would still have to have the necessary qualifications for the public sector jobs. At this point, the bill was given 1<sup>st</sup> Reading. No date has been set for 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading.

### **MINISTRY OF TRAINING, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ANNOUNCES ABORIGINAL FUNDING**

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities announced [\\$1.5 million in funding](#) for an Aboriginal charitable organization named Indspire. The Ministry says that the funding will support up to 400 scholarships through the Building Brighter Futures Bursaries, Scholarships and Awards program for Aboriginal learners. As well, some of the funding will be used to encourage more Aboriginal students to enter teaching and education related professions.