

## OSSTF/FEESO STRIKES DOMINATE BUSINESS OF THE LEGISLATURE

After a one week recess, the Ontario Legislature returned to a tumultuous week on the education front. Early Monday, the Education Relations Commission released its advice to the Minister of Education, Liz Sandals (Guelph), declaring that the school year was in jeopardy for students in the Durham, Rainbow and Peel District School Boards. As the day's Question Period began, [Sandals said](#) that the Liberal government would introduce back-to-work legislation in the afternoon to end the local strikes. She immediately requested all-party consent to expedite the legislation within one day and have teachers return to work the following day. The NDP refused to grant all-party consent. Without all-party consent, the legislation would require a minimum of four sessional days meaning that schools would not re-open until the end of the week. The Liberals quickly condemned the NDP for delaying the re-start of the school year in an attempt to shift the blame away from themselves.

As MPPs began debating the government's back-to-work legislation entitled [Bill 103, Protecting the School Year Act](#), on late Tuesday afternoon, the [Ontario Labour Relations Board](#) released its judgement on the school boards' assertion that the OSSTF/FEESO local strikes were illegal. The OLRB determined that the local strikes were illegal because some central table issues were being mentioned as local table issues on the strike lines. Despite disagreeing with the OLRB's decision, OSSTF/FEESO [indicated](#) that it would abide by the ruling and teachers in the three affected boards would return to work the following day.

As everyone seemed surprised with the timing of the decision's release, few had time to read and understand the full rationale for the OLRB's decision. Therefore, MPPs continued debating the back-to-work legislation late into Tuesday night. A number of MPPs joined the debate including [NDP MPPs](#) Lisa Gretzky (Windsor West), Wayne Gates (Niagara Falls), Percy Hatfield (Niagara-Tecumseh), Michael Mantha (Algoma-Manitoulin), Jennifer French (Oshawa), Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth), and Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay). The NDP's main argument was that the back-to-work legislation demonstrated the lack of commitment from the Liberals to the negotiations process. Meanwhile, the [Liberal Party debaters](#) included Labour Minister Kevin Flynn (Oakville), Education Minister Liz Sandals (Guelph) Children and Youth Minister Tracey MacCharles (Pickering-Scarborough East), Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care Dipika Damerla (Mississauga East-Cooksville) and Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa-Centre). They concentrated on outlining the fears of parents and students, particularly for Grade 12 students, in losing learning opportunities and being hampered in their post-secondary education. The [Progressive Conservatives](#), as well as making comments during debate, had their Education critic Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North) as the sole debater. Dunlop decried the two-tier negotiations process blaming it for the impasse but said that his party would be supporting the legislation nonetheless.

As the next day's (Wednesday) [Question Period concluded](#), which featured continued calls for the resignation of the Minister of Education by the PCs, OSSTF/FEESO [announced](#) that the three local school districts declared as having illegal strikes would re-commence their strikes after the two-week moratorium, as outlined in the OLRB decision. With OSSTF/FEESO's pronouncement, any talk of the government withdrawing the back-to-work legislation ended. By the end of the sessional day on Thursday, the Liberals and PCs combined to pass the legislation. Durham, Rainbow and Peel District School Board teachers are now legally compelled to conclude the 2014–15 school year without disruption. At the same time, a process has been set out that includes mediation and, potentially arbitration, to resolve the local strikes.

During the last few weeks, the pressure on the Liberal government, and particularly the Minister of Education, had grown substantially. Faced with heavy criticism from the opposition parties, media, parents and students for their perceived inaction on the strikes, the Liberals used the Legislative hammer of a back-to-work bill to compel teachers to return to work. While this may be a temporary solution, it does little to help move the negotiations process. At the same time, the pressure from the Liberal caucus will continue to intensify on the Education Minister and the government as the threat of wholesale disruption to the start of school in the fall looms ever more likely. Liberal MPPs will not want to be harangued by their constituents throughout the summer recess about this issue.

### **BILL 57, POOLED REGISTERED PENSION PLANS ACT BECOMES LAW**

While planning to begin an Ontario Retirement Pension Plan in 2017, the Liberals also passed legislation to enact [Pool Registered Pension Plans](#).

Finance Minister Charles Sousa [said](#) the bill would allow businesses to offer these plans to their employees. It also makes them available to the self-employed. Participation in the pooled plans is voluntary for employers. While the Liberals were joined by the PCs in supporting this bill, the NDP has steadfastly opposed its implementation. NDP MPP [Jennifer French \(Oshawa\) highlighted](#) her party's opposition by saying, "Ontarians deserve stability and security in retirement, and they deserve to know that the money they invest isn't going to be cannibalized by fees. Generally speaking, in a private plan such as PRPPs, individuals can expect to lose roughly half of their benefit to fees over their lifetime. Mr. Speaker, this is not an insignificant amount. It can mean the difference between security in retirement and struggling to get by."

### **BILL 45, MAKING HEALTHIER CHOICES ACT ALSO BECOMES LAW**

The Minister of Health and Long-term Care, Dipika Damerla (Mississauga East–Cooksville), [applauded](#) the passage of [Bill 45, Making Healthier Choices Act](#).

The bill will increase fines for those who sell tobacco to underage youth. It will also ban the sale of flavoured tobacco and e-cigarettes to people under the age of 19. The bill also regulates the display and promotion of e-cigarettes. As well, in an effort to combat obesity, the bill will also require chain restaurants and fast-food service premises to post calorie counts for food and beverage items, including alcohol, on menus and menu boards. The bill passed overwhelmingly with the

lone dissenting vote coming from PC MPP Randy Hillier (Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington). He [cited](#) studies claiming that e-cigarettes have been proven to be an effective means for helping smokers stop their addiction.

### **BILL 80, ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AMENDMENT ACT ENACTED INTO LAW**

The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa–Centre), [praised](#) the passage of [Bill 80, Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment Act](#), which prohibits the acquisition and breeding of orcas in Ontario. The new Act requires facilities that house marine animals to have animal welfare committees and qualified veterinarians on staff. The bill passed with the support of the Liberals and NDP. The PCs opposed the legislation citing concerns that facilities such as Marineland in Niagara Falls may be forced to close as a result.

### **MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS RANKED BALLOT TO BE REVIEWED**

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale) [announced](#) that the province will review the Municipal Election Act to explore how municipalities could implement a ranked ballot voting system in time for the 2018 municipal elections. McMeekin said that ranked ballots allow a voter to rank candidates in order of preference instead of voting for a single candidate. The review will also consider the current effectiveness of rules on campaign financing, third party advertising, enforcement and accessibility in municipal elections. School trustee elections will not be part of the review. Public comments will be accepted until July 27, 2015.

### **LANGUAGE INTERPRETER SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

The Minister of Responsible for Women’s Issues, Tracey MacCharles (Pickering–Scarborough East) [announced](#) a \$9.3 million investment to the Language Interpreter Services (LIS) program. The program will deliver interpreter services for survivors of domestic or sexual violence. The program is to help communicate with victims of domestic violence or sexual violence who have limited English or French language skills, or are deaf. The funding commitment is for three years.

### **BILL TO BAN CONVERSION THERAPY SET TO PASS PRIOR TO LEGISLATURE’S SUMMER RECESS**

After some legislative wrangling, the House Leaders for all three parties announced that NDP MPP Cheri DiNovo’s (Parkdale–High Park) bill banning conversion therapy would pass before the legislature recessed for the summer on June 4. DiNovo’s private members’ [Bill 77, Affirming Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Act](#), would protect youth from therapy aimed at preventing them from growing up to be LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual or queer).