

# Queen's Park notes

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For the week of April 11–15, 2016

## PROVINCIAL AND DEMONSTRATION SCHOOLS TO STAY OPEN ANOTHER YEAR

On the day before a planned rally and a NDP motion, the Liberals delayed the implementation of changes to the province's provincial and demonstration schools for another school year. The schools targeted for the consultation and potential closures include Trillium in Milton, Amethyst Demonstration School in London, Sagonaska Demonstration School in Belleville, Centre Jules-Léger provincial and demonstration schools in Ottawa and Robarts School for the Deaf in London. Education Minister Liz Sandals said that the consultations would continue but any recommendations would not be implemented for the coming school year. At the same time, Sandals gave no indication that some of these schools would not close in the coming years. In the meantime, both NDP and Progressive Conservative MPPs attended the rally and both parties supported NDP Education Critic Lisa Gretzky's (Windsor West) [motion](#) calling on the government to keep the schools open. Despite this effort, Gretzky's motion was defeated by the Liberals 44–36.

## PROPOSED DAYCARE CHANGES WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED

After a public outcry on the Liberals' planned regulatory changes to daycare, the Minister of Education, Liz Sandals, announced that the changes would not be enacted. Specifically, the designation of infant, toddler and pre-schooler would not be changed. The Liberals had indicated that all three would see their age threshold lowered. For infants it would change from 18 months to 12 months. Toddlers would have changed to 12 months to 24 months instead of the current 18 months to 30 months and preschoolers would start at 24 months instead of 30 months. Parents and municipalities indicated that the changes would have made many children ineligible for daycare and have increased costs exorbitantly.

## LIBERALS ASSAILED OVER CHANGES TO CHILDREN'S AUTISTIC PROGRAMS

Despite the Liberal government's promise to increase funding for autistic children by [\\$333 million over 5 years](#), parents of autistic children decried the changes. Parents are upset because, despite the increased funding, the Liberals are planning to decrease the availability of funding for autistic children five years and older. The Liberals claim that they need to tackle wait lists for younger children when therapy is most helpful. As the week progressed, parents descended on Queen's Park demanding that older children still receive Intensive

Behavioural Intervention (IBI). Emotions were high as a number of parents were ejected from the public gallery. As well, the Minister of Children and Youth Services, Tracy MacCharles (Pickering—Scarborough East), openly wept as she was being grilled by the opposition in Question Period. With such scathing criticism, the Liberals are being pressed very hard on this issue. Whether they relent on this file is the question.

## **POLITICAL FUNDRAISING CHANGES IMMINENT**

After weeks of headlines in Ontario newspapers, particularly the *Toronto Star*, Kathleen Wynne agreed that changes needed to be made to the way fundraising is conducted. To that end, she invited Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown (Simcoe North) and NDP Leader Andrea Horwath (Hamilton Centre) to a meeting to discuss potential changes to the system. After the meeting, Horwath and Brown emerged unsatisfied and claimed that Wynne was not taking their proposals seriously. [Horwath's proposals](#) concentrated on process. She particularly wants Wynne to task Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer with the mandate to begin the process by selecting a committee of MPPs and citizens representing various organizations. These MPPs and citizens would hold hearings and report back to the Legislature by September 30 with specific proposals. These proposals would then form the basis of any new legislation. Meanwhile, [Brown also proposed](#) a similar committee review to Horwath's but he also wanted a public inquiry into current fundraising practices by the Liberals. Brown also wants limits on third-party advertising and a ban on corporate and union donations. Later in the week, Wynne met with Green Party Leader Mike Shreiner. [Shreiner's proposals](#) mostly mirrored Brown's with the important caveat that Shreiner wants to see some form of public financing of election campaigns. For her part, Wynne rejected Brown's calls for a public inquiry. But, she did agree that corporate and union donations would be banned effective January 1, 2017. She also promised to bring forth legislation this spring and said that the legislation would also be reviewed after First Reading, in addition to the usual committee review after Second Reading, to allow for more public input.

## **NEW BILLS INTRODUCED**

### **BILL 183, THE GIRLS' GOVERNMENT DAY ACT**

NDP MPP Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale—High Park) introduced [Bill 183, the Girls' Government Day Act](#). DiNovo's bill would proclaim April 12 as Girls' Government Day so that girls can be encouraged to become active in politics.

### **BILL 184, THE LAWREN HARRIS DAY ACT**

Liberal MPP Han Dong (Trinity—Spadina) introduced a Bill 184, [the Lawren Harris Day Act](#). Harris was a Canadian painter and a member of the Group of Seven.

### **BILL 185, THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES AMENDMENT ACT (SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COMMISSION)**

NDP MPP Paul Miller (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek) introduced [Bill 185, the Ministry of Community and Social Services Amendment Act \(Social Science](#)

[Research Commission\)](#). Miller wants to establish a Social Assistance Research Commission that would recommend "evidence-based social assistance rates" to the provincial government on an annual basis.

### **BILL 186, THE ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN ACT (STRENGTHENING RETIREMENT SECURITY ACT)**

Associate Finance Minister Mitzi Hunter (Scarborough—Guildwood) introduced [Bill 186, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act \(Strengthening Retirement Security Act\)](#). The bill sets out in greater detail aspects of the proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan (ORPP) that would cover workers without employer-based pension plans. As well, the bill delays the implementation date for the ORPP to January 1, 2018. The ORPP would not impact OSSTF/FEESO members enrolled either in the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP) or the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System (OMERS).

## BILLS PASSED

### **BILL 173, JOBS FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW ACT (BUDGET MEASURES)**

The Liberal government's budget [Bill 173, Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act \(Budget Measures\)](#). The budget bill passed, despite opposition by both the PCs and NDP by a vote of 54–44.

### **PC MPP JACK MACLAREN'S MISADVENTURES**

With many important issues being discussed at Queen's Park this week, the media also found time to focus on the salacious details of PC MPP Jack MacLaren's (Carleton—Mississippi Mills) bawdy jokes. MacLaren has been accused by many of engaging in misogynistic "jokes" at recent events in his constituency. Unfortunately for MacLaren and, fortunately for the rest of society, times have changed and MacLaren's inappropriate "jokes" are no longer tolerated. On top of this, MacLaren's website has been featuring constituent testimonials that have stock footage photos. Faced with accusations that the photos and testimonials were false, MacLaren said that he did this to protect the privacy of his constituents. In response to MacLaren's indiscretions, Conservative Leader Patrick Brown removed him as Eastern Ontario Caucus Chair. But, this action did little to appease MacLaren's detractors. By week's end, even Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne was recommending MacLaren's ouster from the Conservative caucus. Despite being one of Brown's first MPP and one of only three caucus endorsements, MacLaren's standing with Brown may not be able to withstand much greater public scrutiny.

### **MORE HYDRO ONE SHARES SOLD**

The Ontario government announced that it has sold another 15 per cent of Hydro One to private investors for a total of 30 per cent so far. The government sold 70 million shares raising a total of \$1.71 billion. The Liberals say they need to partially sell-off Hydro One to raise infrastructure funding.

### **LIBERALS DISMISS PARTY'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

The Ontario Liberal Party's Executive Council has dismissed Earl Provost as the Party's Executive Director. Provost, on the job for over one year, had previously served a brief tenure as Chief of Staff to Toronto's former Mayor, the late Rob Ford. The Party has given no reason for the dismissal.