

AUDITOR GENERAL REPORT ON GOVERNMENT PAYMENTS TO EDUCATION-SECTOR UNIONS

After it was revealed last fall that the Liberal government reimbursed education sector unions, including OSSTF/FEESO, for some of the excessive costs for central table bargaining negotiations, the Ontario Legislature's Public Accounts Committee tasked the Auditor General (AG) to review bargaining costs paid to education sector unions since 2008.

The AG found, that despite concerns raised about the probity of those payments by both the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party and media outlets, the negotiations reimbursement money, totaling \$3.7 million, did not violate the *Ontario Labour Relations Act*. As well, she noted that all monies provided were audited and properly accounted for. No malfeasance was identified. And, the AG acknowledged that the first-time implementation of the *School Boards Collective Bargaining Act*, with its two-tiered bargaining process, greatly contributed to any inflated bargaining costs. She was re-assured by the Ministry of Education that future bargaining rounds would be less cumbersome and more efficient.

The AG also acknowledged that education sector unions must be involved when major provincial initiatives impact them, including the review of the *School Boards Collective Bargaining Act*. She urged the Ministry of Education to ensure transparent processes with education-sector stakeholders, including unions.

Having found no malfeasance, the AG expanded her review to include monies forwarded to education sector unions for professional development since 2000.

The AG stated that \$80.5 million was transferred for that purpose. She further stated that \$45 million went to the Ontario Teachers' Federation and the remaining \$35 million went to the four education-sector affiliates. Of that money, the AG alleged that \$22 million was given with "no strings attached."

Despite her concerns, the AG acknowledged that education sector unions in Ontario have a long tradition of being involved in professional development. Her recommendation was that the delivery of funding should be open and transparent and be regularly assessed and that accountability measures be enacted.

Despite these findings, Progressive Conservative MPP Lisa MacLeod (Nepean—Carleton) alleged that, "[This is money that could be spent on guidance counsellors, special education supports, and school infrastructure repairs.](#)"

For two successive days in Question Period, MacLeod, the PC Party's Treasury Board critic, continued to [hurl accusations](#) that this money was diverted from student supports. Education Minister Liz Sandals denied that happening. In fact, [Sandals said](#) that professional development for education workers has been ongoing since the days of former Progressive Conservative Premier Bill Davis.

OSSTF/FEESO President Paul Elliott responded to the AG's report by [saying](#), "OSSTF/FEESO has been delivering effective and efficient professional development (PD) to our members for many years, and since 2006 the Ontario government has contributed just over \$6 million to support the professional growth of the teachers and education workers we represent. Over that period we have delivered more than a thousand workshops, organized six provincial conferences and hosted dozens of regional symposia, all delivering professional development opportunities of the highest possible quality."

At this point, it will be interesting to see if the Conservatives decide to pursue this issue, possibly in an opposition day motion, similar to what they did last fall when the issue first arose.

NEW BILLS INTRODUCED

BILL 199, CHILD CARE AND EARLY YEARS AMENDMENT ACT (CHILD CARE WAITING LISTS)

In another case of competing bills, Liberal MPP Arthur Potts (Beaches—East York) has put forward his version of a [childcare waiting list bill](#).

Similar to NDP MPP [Peter Tabuns' bill](#) on the same issue, Potts wants to make it illegal for childcare providers to charge a fee for being put on a waiting list. As a government MPP, Potts' bill has a greater likelihood of passing.

BILL 200, PROTECTING STUDENTS ACT

[Bill 200, Protecting Students Act](#), is the second attempt by the Kathleen Wynne Liberals to pass a bill in response to Justice Lesage's report on teacher discipline by the Ontario College of Teachers.

The [initial Bill 103](#), died on the order paper with the 2014 election. Afterwards, the Liberals did not immediately re-introduce the bill because of the ongoing central table collective bargaining negotiations.

According to Education Minister Liz Sandals, the proposed *Protecting Students Act* would strengthen the disciplinary processes for educators and increase transparency at the Ontario College of Teachers and the College of Early Childhood Educators. She claims that the changes will help protect children and students and maintain public confidence. She also says that the act would require the mandatory revocation of a teacher's certificate if they are found guilty of sexual abuse or prescribed acts of child pornography.

The main elements of change, identified by Minister Sandals include:

- Ensuring a teacher's certificate is automatically revoked if he or she has been found guilty of sexual abuse or acts relating to child pornography.
- Requiring employers, including school boards, to inform the college when they have restricted a teacher's duties or dismissed him or her for misconduct.
- Allowing the college to share information with the school board or employer if the subject of a complaint poses an immediate risk to a student or child.
- Requiring the college to publish all decisions from its discipline committee.
- Improving timelines for the investigation and consideration of complaints.

With only two weeks remaining in the Legislature's spring session, the bill will likely have to await for the fall session to pass 2nd Reading and then be forwarded to committee for review.

BILL 201, ELECTION FINANCES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT

After revelations by various media outlets regarding high cost, private fundraising events netting large contributions for the Liberal party, Premier Kathleen Wynne responded to accusations that money was being exchanged for political favours. The Liberals have introduced Bill 201, The [Election Finances Statute Law Amendment Act](#).

NEW BILLS INTRODUCED

The most significant changes are that union and corporate donations will be banned effective January 1, 2017. As well, donation limits will be drastically reduced, third-party advertising will be severely capped and both leadership and local nomination contests will be subject to election rules. The bill also includes rules around loans and guarantees and introduces a new per-vote allowance of public financing of elections.

In an effort to gain public confidence on this issue, the Liberals have announced public hearings on the bill after 1st Reading in addition to the standard legislative protocol of hearings after 2nd Reading. The initial hearings are set for this summer.

BILL 202, STANDING UP AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM IN ONTARIO ACT

In response to the international movement for a boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel and Israeli-interests, former Progressive Conservative Leader Tim Hudak (Niagara West-Glanbrook) and Liberal MPP Mike Colle (Eglinton—Lawrence) introduced [Bill 202, *Standing Up Against Anti-Semitism in Ontario Act*](#).

Despite the efforts to frame the BDS movement as an anti-Semitic attack on the state of Israel and the Jewish people worldwide, the bill failed. Although all

MPPs condemned anti-Semitism in their speeches, NDP and Liberal MPPs (except Colle) joined to defeat the bill.

BILL 203, FREE MY RYE ACT (LIQUOR STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT)

PC MPP Tim Hudak is introducing a [bill](#) that would set targets for increased distribution of spirits in more LCBO stores.

BILL 204, PROMOTING AFFORDABLE HOUSING ACT

The Minister of Housing, Ted McMeekin, introduced [Bill 204, *Promoting Affordable Housing Act*](#).

The bill would allow municipalities to implement inclusionary zoning. This type of zoning would allow municipalities to require developers to include affordable units in all new residential projects.

BILL 205, FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AMENDMENT ACT (DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANTS)

[PC MPP Bill Bailey's \(Sarnia\) bill](#) seeks an amendment to the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*, 1997 to permit the hunting and trapping of double-crested [cormorants](#).

BILLS PASSED

BILL 172, CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND LOW-CARBON ECONOMY ACT

The centerpiece of the Liberals' [climate change bill](#) passed 3rd Reading and was granted Royal Assent soon afterwards. The new Act would create a cap and trade system for Ontario that would follow the example of California. The Liberals' bill passed with most NDP MPPs present to support it. The PCs opposed the bill.

BILLS DEBATED

BILL 151, WASTE-FREE ONTARIO ACT

Environment Minister Glen Murray (Toronto Centre) had a busy week with the debate on this [bill](#) as well. The bill calls for a less wasteful society in which a “circular economy” is encouraged through minimizing the use of raw materials and the reduction, re-use and recycling of resources. The bill is nearing a 3rd Reading vote.

BILL 190, SAFE TEXTING ZONES ACT

PC MPP Vic Fedeli's (Nipissing) [Bill 190, Safe Texting Zones Act](#) passed 2nd Reading and was forwarded to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs for review. Fedeli's bill would authorize the Minister of Transportation to designate any part of the King's Highway as a texting zone.

MOTIONS DEBATED

IBI TREATMENT FOR AUTISTIC CHILDREN

A couple of weeks after NDP Leader Andrea Horwath introduced a motion to restore funding for Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) Therapy for autistic children over the age of five, PC Leader Patrick Brown did the same during his party's [opposition day motion](#) this past week. The emotional debate saw parents of autistic children fill the public gallery. Despite the NDP and PCs joining forces on the issue, Brown's motion was defeated by the Liberals by a vote of 50–41.

NORTHERN ONTARIO HIGHWAY 17 EXTENSION

NDP MPP Sarah Campbell (Kenora—Rainy River) put forward a [motion](#) calling government to complete the expansion of Highway 17 from Kenora to the Manitoba border. The motion passed by a voice vote.

**The Legislature will be adjourned during the week of May 23, 2016.
It will resume on Monday, May 30, 2016.**