

Queen's Park notes

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For the week of May 2–6, 2016

AUTISM QUESTIONS RESULT IN MPP'S EJECTION FROM QUESTION PERIOD

Hundreds of parents, education workers and community supporters descended on Queen's Park for a rally in support of maintaining Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) for autistic children five years of age and older. MPPs from the NDP and PC caucuses joined them after Question Period demanding that the Liberals reverse their decision. OSSTF/FEESO President Paul Elliott also spoke at the rally adding his voice in support of IBI therapy for all autistic children, despite age. Earlier in the day, Question Period saw the rare ejection of a MPP. The NDP's Children and Youth Critic, [Monique Taylor \(Hamilton Mountain\)](#), claimed that Liberal government MPPs were refusing meetings with parents of autistic children. Her claims elicited howls from the Liberals claiming that they have not refused any meetings. A seated Taylor angrily replied and refused to stop hectoring the Liberals despite the pleas of the Legislature Speaker. The Speaker then ejected Taylor for the rest of the day. Afterwards, Taylor was greeted with great enthusiasm by rally participants for her stand.

NEW BILLS INTRODUCED

BILL 193, DOOR-TO-DOOR SALES PROHIBITION ACT

Liberal MPP Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre) introduced [Bill 193, Door-to-Door Sales Prohibition Act](#). Baker's bill would prohibit door-to-door sales of air conditioners, water heaters, furnaces, and water treatment devices. The bill is in response to concerns that door-to-door salespersons are preying on vulnerable seniors.

BILL 194, HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (HELMET EXEMPTION FOR SIKH MOTORCYCLISTS)

Another attempt to allow religiously observant Sikhs to wear their turbans instead of helmets on their motorcycles has been introduced by PC MPP Todd

Smith (Prince Edward—Hastings). Smith's [Bill 194, Highway Traffic Amendment Act \(Helmet Exemption for Sikh Motorcyclists\)](#), would exempt Sikh religion adherents, who have unshorn hair and who habitually wear turbans, from the requirement to wear a helmet.

BILL 195, CHILD CARE AND EARLY YEARS AMENDMENT ACT (WAITING LISTS), PETER TABUNS

NDP MPP Peter Tabuns (Toronto Danforth) introduced [Bill 195, Child Care and Early Years Act \(Waiting Lists\)](#), which would ban child care centres from requiring deposits for putting children on waiting lists.

BILLS PASSED

BILL 119, HEALTH INFORMATION PROTECTION ACT

With the support of the NDP, the Liberals successfully passed [Bill 119, Health Information Protection Act](#). Health and Long-term Care Minister, Eric Hoskins (St. Paul's), introduced the bill in response to revelations that patient records were being inappropriately accessed and some personal information was divulged for financial gain. The bill now sets out rules concerning the disclosure and use of quality of care information.

BILLS DEBATED

BILL 135, ENERGY STATUTE AMENDMENT ACT

The Legislature began Third Reading debate on [Bill 135, Energy Statute Amendment Act](#). One part of the bill proposed by Energy Minister Bob Chiarelli (Ottawa West—Nepean) would require government agencies to prepare energy conservation plans.

BILL 156, ALTERNATIVE FINANCES SERVICES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT

Second Reading debate continued on [Bill 156, Alternative Finances Services Statute Law Amendment Act](#). Consumer Affairs Minister David Orazietti [said](#) that this legislation on payday loan companies is needed because they generate the single most complaints for this department. He says that this legislation is designed to protect and support vulnerable consumers.

BILL 186, ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN ACT (STRENGTHENING RETIREMENT SECURITY FOR ONTARIANS)

With Second Reading debate on [Bill 186, Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act \(Strengthening Retirement Security for Ontarians\)](#), not progressing quickly enough for the Liberals, they have introduced a time allocation motion to speed up its passage. Once the time allocation motion is passed, the bill will be forwarded to the Standing Committee for Social Policy. Public hearings have already been scheduled for May 17 & 18. The Liberals want the bill to pass prior to the Legislature's summer recess. The Liberals want the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan to be in place by January 1, 2018.

BILL 187, COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ACCESSIBLE PARKING IN MUNICIPALITIES ACT

PC MPP Gila Martow (Thornhill) introduced [Bill 187, Commission of Inquiry into Accessible Parking in Municipalities Act](#). Martow's bill calls for a commission to be appointed to report on accessible parking in municipalities for persons with disabilities. The commission must begin its inquiry within 60 days after being appointed and must make an interim report in six months and a final report in 12 months. The bill passed Second Reading by voice vote and was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

BILL 191, HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (NUMBER PLATES AND CARRYING RACKS)

PC MPP Norm Miller (Parry Sound—Muskoka) and Liberal MPP Eleanor McMahon (Burlington) have jointly sponsored [Bill 191, Highway Traffic Amendment Act \(Number Plates and Carrying Racks\)](#). The bill would allow a person to drive a vehicle, with a rear-mounted bike rack, on a highway even if the rack obscures the number plate for the vehicle that is required to be attached to the rear of the vehicle. The bill passed 2nd Reading by voice vote and was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

MOTIONS DEBATED

PC MPP BILL WALKER (BRUCE—GREY—OWEN SOUND) PROPOSED THE FOLLOWING MOTION:

“That, in the opinion of this House, the Government of Ontario should proclaim the month of September as Childhood Cancer Awareness Month in Ontario, to recognize the gold ribbon as the awareness symbol of childhood cancer and to strongly encourage all citizens to join in the fight against childhood cancer.”

[Walker’s motion](#) was carried with all party support.

AROUND THE LEGISLATURE

EDUCATION WEEK RECOGNIZED

The Legislature recognized Education Week with remarks from all three parties. Education Minister Liz Sandals (Guelph) began by [saying](#), “This is also an opportunity, Speaker, for us to build on our renewed vision for education by highlighting one of our top priorities. This year, our theme for Education Week is “Achieving Excellence: Promoting Well-Being.” Well-being is a positive sense of self, spirit and belonging that we feel when our cognitive, emotional, social and physical needs are being met. Over the past decade, we have seen growing evidence demonstrating why well-being is an important element of overall student success.”

Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown (Simcoe North) spoke on behalf of his party and [said](#), “I assumed the role of the Ontario PC education critic because I learned from my mother at an early age the dedication and hard work that goes into the vocation of teaching. I often witnessed endless hours of marking and prepping for her classes. She encouraged her students to do their best and learn everything they could not just from books but important life skills as well.”

Meanwhile, NDP Education Critic Lisa Gretzky (Windsor West) spoke on the perils that education workers have faced from the government. Gretzky [said](#), “We’ve seen attacks on education workers, both under Bill 115 and Bill 103—it’s important to note that the Conservatives supported both of those bills. They then threatened to dock the pay of the lowest-paid education workers if they did their jobs exactly as described in their contracts.”

SEXUAL HARASSMENT ALLEGATIONS EXPLODE

During a news conference to announce rising secondary school graduation rates, Premier Kathleen Wynne was asked if she had to deal with any sexual harassment complaints with any of her MPPs. Wynne replied that she had with two members of her caucus but because of confidentiality and privacy concerns, she could not comment further. This set off wild speculation and culminated in the revelation that former Niagara Falls Liberal MPP Kim Craiton had been forced out because of sexual harassment allegations by his staff.

The issue of sexual harassment in the Legislature came up recently because of the “bawdy jokes” of PC MPP Jack MacLaren. During a community fundraising dinner, MacLaren made inappropriate sexual remarks to his federal counterpart. As a result of his behaviour, MacLaren was demoted by party leader Patrick Brown and is currently enrolled in sensitivity training. Meanwhile, Brown has been desperate to expunge his party of misogynistic perceptions and has pressed the other two political parties to admit that they too have sexist MPPs. With Wynne’s admission and NDP Leader Andrea Horwath’s agreement that she has seen sexist behaviour in the Legislature, Brown may feel less political heat. If all three political parties have sexist MPPs and are involved in sexist behavior, then Brown will be able to claim that his party is not the only one and that it is a problem elsewhere too. And, if the media continues to press for the identity of more of MPPs involved in sexual harassment allegations, Brown may indeed get his wish.

OPP INVESTIGATING LIBERALS ON WIND POWER CONTRACTS

After [media reports](#) alleged that the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) are investigating the Liberals on deletion of emails in regards to cancelled wind power contracts, NDP Leader Andrea Horwath (Hamilton Centre) [demanded](#) that the Liberals call a public inquiry into the matter. Horwath’s NDP and the opposition Conservatives both assailed the Liberals over what is now the fifth OPP investigation of the governing Liberals.

HORWATH DEMANDS ENERGY MINISTER’S RESIGNATION

During questioning on the OPP investigations, Energy Minister Bob Chiarelli (Ottawa West—Nepean) challenged Andrea Horwath’s allegations by accusing her of not being supportive enough of the provinces’ energy policies. But, the preciseness of Chiarelli’s response became controversial. In the [videotape of Chiarelli’s response](#), it appears he said that Horwath “pees all over the map” while Chiarelli claims he did not say such a phrase. The official record of the Legislature’s proceedings, [Hansard](#), sided with Chiarelli’s claim but the NDP did not accept Hansard’s explanation. The NDP called on Hansard to correct the record. As well, the NDP demanded Chiarelli’s resignation claiming that his response fitted a pattern of continued [sexist behaviour](#) by him. And, Chiarelli’s unorthodox apology for offence being taken over something he claimed he did not say did not assuage any lingering anger.

PC MPP LISA MACLEOD REVEALS CLINICAL DEPRESSION DIAGNOSIS

PC MPP Lisa MacLeod (Nepean—Carleton) revealed that she has been [diagnosed as clinically-depressed](#) for the past year-and-a-half. MacLeod attributed many factors to her diagnosis including her unsuccessful bid to lead the Progressive Conservative party and the daily pressures of being a MPP. Despite her diagnosis, MacLeod has said that she will again be a candidate in 2018.

PC MPP SAYS SCHOOL CLOSINGS DEVASTATING OWEN SOUND COMMUNITY

PC MPP Bill Walker (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound) said that school closings are devastating his community. According to Walker, the Bluewater District School Board has recently completed an accommodation review, during which parents and community partners were asked to comment on upgrading two Owen Sound high schools to a grade 7–12. [Walker asked Sandals](#), “In my riding, five schools are closing. OSCVI alumni, parents and students have appealed to the minister to step in and review the decision—a call that’s supported by over 2,100 petitioners. Mr. Speaker, these constituents want to know: Will the minister support a one-year moratorium on the decision and allow the community, the students and all stakeholder groups to consult on the proposal to close OSCVI?”

Sandals replied, “Actually, under the *Education Act*, it falls within the jurisdiction of school boards—not the Minister of Education—to make decisions about accommodation reviews. In fact, the boards are charged with that responsibility. I would like to point out that I am the Minister of Education, not the minister of schools.”

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION ANNOUNCEMENTS

LIBERALS LAUD RISE IN GRADUATION RATES

Premier Kathleen Wynne and Education Minister Liz Sandals [announced Ontario’s high school graduation rate](#) increased to 85.5 per cent for five-year graduates, the highest level in history. The graduate rate is up 17 per cent since the Liberals assumed power in 2004. As well, Wynne and Sandals indicated that students graduating within four years rose to 78.3 per cent in 2015, up from 56 per cent in 2004. The Liberals credited all those involved in education, including education workers, for the rise in the rates.

\$137 MILLION EARMARKED FOR NEW AND RENOVATED SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

The Ministry of Education [announced](#) twenty projects, including four new schools and sixteen additions and retrofits. As well, Toronto, Kingsville and Oshawa will see the construction of nineteen new custom-built child care rooms in local schools. This will create an additional 318 new licensed spaces for infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers.

MORE SCHOOLS TO BECOME COMMUNITY HUBS

The Ministry of Education will [be investing almost \\$90 million dollars](#) to expand child care and child and family support programs in schools and create spaces in schools for community use. Education Minister Liz Sandals says that this will make it easier for community partners to create community hubs in schools by expanding the list of public organizations able to purchase or lease surplus school property before it is placed on the open market. This list will now include Children's Mental Health Agencies, First Nations and Métis Organizations and others. Sandals say this will allow organizations more time to place an offer, allowing greater opportunity for continued use of these properties by the community.

IN OTHER NEWS

LIBERALS CALL NOMINATION MEETING FOR SCARBOROUGH—ROUGE RIVER

The Liberals have called a nomination meeting for Sunday, June 5, for the upcoming by-election in Scarborough—Rouge River. So far two candidates, former Federal NDP MP Rathika Sitsabaiesan and Piragal Thiru, a Liberal party official, have declared. At this time, the NDP and PC parties have not yet called their nomination meetings. The by-election was made necessary by the sudden resignation of long-time Liberal MPP Bas Balkissoon. Premier Wynne must call the by-election by mid-September.