

Queen's Park notes

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For the week of November 20–November 26, 2017

NEW BILLS INTRODUCED

BILL 179, FLOOD AVOIDANCE, INSURANCE AND RECOVERY STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT

NDP MPP Taras Natyshak (Essex) introduced this bill that would make two significant changes to flood insurance for property owners. First, flood insurance shall not be declined on the basis of flooding if the flooding took place in a declared emergency. Second, disaster recovery assistance shall be provided for residential properties that suffer flooding from sewer backup, without means testing. Natyshak's bill is in response to his community's substantial flooding this past summer. His bill moved quickly through 1st and 2nd Reading and was referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

BILL 180, GARRETT'S LEGACY ACT (REQUIREMENTS FOR MOVABLE SOCCER GOALS)

PC MPP Todd Smith (Prince Edward—Hastings) and Liberal MPP Sophie Kiwala (Kingston and the Islands) co-sponsored this bill in honour of a 15 year-old who died when a soccer goalpost fell on him. The bill proposes regulations seeking to ensure that goalposts are securely attached to a level surface.

BILL 181, FILIPINO HERITAGE MONTH ACT

NDP MPP Peter Tabuns' (Toronto—Danforth) bill would proclaim the month of June as Filipino Heritage Month.

BILLS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

BILL 153, ORGANIC PRODUCTS ACT

NDP MPP Peter Tabuns (Toronto—Danforth) and PC MPP Sylvia Jones (Dufferin—Caledon) co-sponsored this bill to prohibit the marketing and labelling of products as "organic," unless they have been certified as organic in accordance with the Act. The bill would also require that the Minister assigned the administration of the Act create a register of all products that are certified as organic, and that the Minister periodically update the register. Their bill passed 2nd Reading by voice vote and was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

BILL 173, REDUCING WASTE ONE POD AT A TIME ACT

PC MPP Norm Miller's (Parry Sound—Muskoka) bill would prohibit the sale of single-use beverage (usually for coffee) pods unless they are fully compostable. Miller said that 1.5 million pods are annually sent to Ontario landfills. Miller's bill passed 2nd Reading by voice vote and was referred to Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly.

BILL 174, CANNABIS, SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO AND ROAD SAFETY STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT

Attorney General Yasir Naqvi's (Ottawa Centre) bill would create an Ontario Cannabis Retail Corporation Act which will be responsible for running Ontario's new 40 retail stores for the sale of marijuana as of January 1, 2018. The bill would also amend the *Highway Traffic Act* regarding driving under the influence of drugs. Additionally, the bill includes a provision for authorizing the use of camera systems in school buses. Naqvi's bill passed 2nd Reading and was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

BILL 179, FLOOD AVOIDANCE, INSURANCE AND RECOVERY STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT

Please see above.

BILLS PASSED

BILL 148, FAIR WORKPLACES AND BETTER JOBS ACT

The Liberal government's legislative reply to the [Changing Workplaces Review](#) passed final reading with the support of the NDP by a vote of 67–26. Labour Minister Kevin Flynn's (Oakville) bill increases the minimum wage to \$15 by January 1, 2019. Despite voting in support of the bill at 1st and 2nd Reading, the Conservatives sought to delay the full implementation of the \$15 minimum wage until January 1, 2022.

As well, Minister Flynn [announced](#) that the bill will also:

- Mandate equal pay for part-time, temporary, casual and seasonal employees doing the same job as full-time employees; and equal pay for temporary help agency employees doing the same job as employees at the agencies' client companies
- Expand personal emergency leave to 10 days per calendar year for all employees, with at least two paid days per year for employees who have been employed for at least a week
- Ban employers from requiring a doctor's sick note from an employee taking personal emergency leave
- Provide up to 17 weeks off without the fear of losing their job when a worker or their child has experienced or is threatened with domestic or sexual violence, including paid leave for the first five days
- Bring Ontario's vacation time in line with the national average by ensuring at least three weeks' vacation after five years with the same employer
- Make employee scheduling fairer, including requiring employees to be paid for three hours of work if their shift is cancelled within 48 hours of its scheduled start time

IN OTHER NEWS

NDP MPP SARAH CAMPBELL TO RETIRE

NDP MPP Sarah Campbell (Kenora—Rainy River) ended months of speculation regarding her infrequent attendance at Queen's Park by announcing that she will not run for re-election. Campbell revealed that she has been dealing with her child's health issues and with another child on the way, she felt it was best to step aside and concentrate on her family. Campbell also said that the recent nomination of former Federal Conservative MP Greg Rickford as the Provincial PC candidate contributed to the timing of her announcement. Campbell was first elected in 2011.

TORIES UNVEIL ELECTION PLATFORM

In a carefully stage-managed performance, Conservative Leader Patrick Brown laid out his election platform at his party's policy convention entitled the "[People's Guarantee](#)." After being introduced by his two younger sisters, who professed their admiration and high regard for their older brother, Brown proceeded to unveil a fairly substantial list of party policies. Countering a narrative that he has no plan or a hidden agenda for Ontario, which was heavily propagated by both the Liberals and the NDP, Brown may have put to rest any concerns that he has either. Whether his plan is good or bad for Ontario is another question. Only the electorate will be able to answer that question.

Anchoring Brown's plans is his pledge that if he doesn't fulfil the five core promises that he articulated, he would not seek a second electoral term. His five main planks include: a 22.5 per cent income tax cut for the middle class; a 75 per cent refund of child care expenses; a further 12 per cent cut in hydro bills; a ten-year, \$1.9 billion commitment to mental health; and a new Trust, Integrity and Accountability Act.

Brown's glossy 78-page policy handbook is full of every imaginable promise to every potential voting bloc in Ontario, similar to past Liberal Party election platforms such as Jean Chretien's Red Book. But, notably, Brown makes few tangible promises to the public education sector. Brown's public education promises include:

- Moratorium on all school closures
- Expand financial literacy pilot program to all secondary schools
- Take concrete steps to get math scores back on track
- Appoint a task force of former teaching professionals to learn from the province's best teachers to best inform future curriculum updates
- Install exterior cameras on school buses (already part of proposed Liberal legislation)
- Allow disabled and autistic students to bring their service animals to school
- Support building of stand-alone French-language university
- Envelope Special Education funding to make sure it is spent on Special Education

Importantly, Brown makes no mention of a review of the Funding Formula or a review of the *School Boards Collective Bargaining Act*. His lack of financial commitments to improve the publicly-funded education system is glaring but, at the same time, he does not discuss any drastic, negative impacts on classroom learning. Brown is certainly hoping that education workers will see his lack of highly-publicized negative actions as a positive contrast to former PC leader proposals such as Tim Hudak's 100,000 public-sector job cuts or John Tory's faith-based school funding.

At the same time, public sector workers, including education workers, know that the result of tax cuts eventually impacts public education funding and classroom learning. Brown is certainly hoping that education workers will not pay great attention at this stage because it appears that he is not targeting them for any immediate negative action.

With the release of Brown's election platform, it is obvious that he is doing everything possible to counter the claim that he is an empty vassal devoid of any political convictions. The fact that he may have few, if any, political convictions and will say or do anything to win power, may be inconsequential to voters. Many of these voters may be too busy with their own, immediate concerns to pay much attention to any politician and their agendas, particularly when many in the public have little or no faith in any politician or their promises. But, he at least has a plan. And, that is sometimes enough for some voters.

At this early stage, Brown's gambit to be the new "Bill Davis" of Ontario politics who said "bland works" may be enough to convince Ontarians that he is capable of being their Premier. And, with current Premier Kathleen Wynne at about 70% disapproval ratings, this document may be enough for him to secure government. Of course, as with anything, the next few months will determine if Kathleen Wynne, or NDP Leader Andrea Horwath, will be able to counter his claim to be the proper agent of change Ontario is looking for, one that doesn't blow up the political arena while pursuing a moderate government that most Ontarians generally look for in any political party.

With the Liberals and NDP set to release their policy platforms and with a desire for change in the political headwinds, the next seven months promise to create an exciting political climate. With this platform, Brown has certainly committed himself to the political centre-right and that may be enough for some voters who may be tired of Wynne's agenda. Now, public education workers will be looking to the NDP and their agenda to see if Horwath can offer a strong, countervailing argument to Brown as the proper agent of change.