

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Welcome delegates and guests.

Bienvenue aux délégués et invités. J'espère que vous avez tous passé un été agréable.

I want to again acknowledge and thank the Anishinaabe, Huron-Wendat and Haudenosaunee Nations, on whose traditional lands we are gathered today.

I also want to take a moment to welcome our newest Bargaining Unit. In June, approximately 100 PSSP employees of the Durham District School Board in my home District voted overwhelmingly to join the OSSTF/FEESO family. We are so pleased to have you with us.

When we gathered here a year ago, we were just beginning to prepare for the provincial election that took place in June. And when I spoke to this gathering last year, I said that the political landscape in Ontario at that time was anything but predictable, and that OSSTF/FEESO would need to be prepared for all possible electoral outcomes.

As it turns out, there was one potential outcome I believe none of us could have foreseen.

In preparation for this most uncertain of elections, OSSTF/FEESO made significant efforts to engage members and to create dialogue around important current issues in education.

In October of last year and again in February of this year, we brought local leaders and Political Action Officers to Toronto to consult with them on the issues, and on the political climate in the ridings encompassed by their Districts.

We developed an Education Platform that clearly and concisely articulated our concerns about key issues, and pointed to specific actions that we believed the next government needed to take in order to address those issues.

We hosted regional meetings across the province focused on election readiness and strategies for encouraging members to become involved in the campaigns in their ridings.

Your Provincial Executive settled on an election strategy of endorsing all incumbent NDP MPPs as well as NDP candidates in ridings where that party had finished second in the 2014 election.

Given our heightened concern about a potential PC majority under the leadership of Doug Ford, we initially also endorsed a small handful of Liberal candidates. That changed abruptly when the Liberal campaign unleashed an unprincipled and disingenuous attack on Ontario's unions, and

specifically named OSSTF/FEESO, in a desperate and cynical effort to undermine the NDP. At that point we withdrew our endorsements of Liberal candidates and declared our support for several more NDP candidates. Despite the stakes, no self-respecting union could have continued to endorse even a single Liberal candidate under those odious circumstances.

I don't think it's possible to measure accurately how much impact our endorsements and the activism of our members had on the outcome of the election. We do know that, of the 40 NDP MPPs who were elected in June, OSSTF/FEESO had endorsed 38 of them. I also believe our relationship with the NDP is, right now, at least as good as it has ever been. That's important, because we will need to work together in the years ahead to defend progressive policy. It is also appropriate at this time to recognize our own members who offered themselves as NDP candidates. We commend your commitment, activism, and willingness to put yourself forward.

But we also know that Doug Ford and the Progressive Conservatives won a majority government. And I think it's very much worth reflecting on how that happened, and what that says about the state of political discourse in Ontario.

In sharp contrast to the comprehensive, 98-page costed platform put forward by the NDP or the 64-page Liberal platform, the Conservatives ran their campaign almost entirely on slogans.

Slogans about respecting taxpayers. Slogans about cleaning up the "mess" in government. Slogans about putting the "people" ahead of "the elites".

That last one is particularly important, because it has become, in twenty-first century North America and elsewhere in the world, one of the hallmarks of populist politics.

When populists talk about the elites, they're not talking about multi-millionaires or corporate CEOs or wealthy real estate developers.

When they talk about the elites, they're talking about—and here I have to quote the premier—those who "think they're smarter than other people."

That notion is very much at the core of populist politics, and it's important to think about what it really means. When populists proclaim contempt for "the elites", for "people who think they're smarter", what they're really proclaiming is contempt for people who value knowledge.

They're proclaiming contempt for people who have learned something about the world around them. Contempt for people who can think critically about the propositions put in front of them.

They're proclaiming contempt for the kind of person who might, for example, take the time to read and assess a comprehensive election platform.

When they refer to "elites", what they're really talking about, in fact, is the kind of person who values education.

The rise and success of vacuous populism, is only possible when knowledge and the capacity for shrewd critical thinking are absent from a large enough proportion of the electorate.

That's why education is the enemy of populist politicians who rely on simplistic slogans rather than clear policies, and that's why those politicians want their followers to think of education and knowledge and critical thinking as an elitist pursuit.

That notion is completely antithetical to the long-established core values of public education in this province.

As educators, we know that the role of public education is not simply to prepare students for the challenges they'll face as part of the workforce. We also educate to ensure that they have a base of knowledge and a capacity for critical thinking necessary for participation in meaningful and informed public discourse. It is crucial to the well-being of our democratic process.

While **we** understand and appreciate the foundational role of public education, we don't really know yet the extent to which the Premier and his cabinet understand it, or what plans, if any, they have in mind. But the initial indications are not auspicious.

In several specific instances already, this new government has acted on a de facto anti-knowledge agenda. The cancellation of the basic income pilot project is an affront to evidence-informed decision-making and good governance. To abruptly end a program which they'd promised to continue, before any data had been returned; to throw participating low income Ontarians into devastating uncertainty; and to simply trash the \$50 million dollars that had already been spent, is a clear case of ideology gone wild. We don't know if basic income guarantees are the most effective ways of delivering social support. Finding that out was the purpose of this pilot. But the outright rejection of information because it might conflict with ideological positions is reprehensible. And this is only compounded by the Minister of Children, Community, and Social Services claiming, in a statement she now apparently regrets, that accusations of breaking a campaign promise are "fake news". There should be no place for that sort of thing in Ontario.

And we are surely all familiar with the second instance—the repeal of the 2015 Health and Physical Education curriculum in favour of a 20 year old curriculum that teaches nothing of

consent, sexual and gender diversity, or online safety. The premise for this backward step is false from the outset. This is not about consultation. It is, as the leader of the official opposition has quite rightly pointed out, simply a political pay-off to the premier's supporters. A political pay-off that jeopardizes students' health and well-being while pandering to a certain kind of extreme intolerance, consequences be damned.

We know that we have members who feel trapped between their obligation to follow employer direction and their ethical imperative to keep students safe. You should know that we are currently working at provincial office on guidance we can provide our members for teaching the health and physical education curriculum. We will do so close to the start of the new school year as the situation is currently in enormous flux. We will also work with whomever we can to oppose this backward, dangerous, divisive initiative. And of course we will defend to the hilt any member who, in the good faith exercise of professional judgment, strays outside the outdated confines of the 1998 curriculum in her or his students' best interests.

We should also be deeply troubled by the cancellation of long-planned consultations regarding the inclusion of indigenous content across the curriculum. The savings are trivial; the costs to proper implementation of Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action are incalculable; the damage to the reconciliation process itself is sadly inevitable.

Finally, we have also already seen the removal of \$100 million that was to be used for physical plant improvements to schools. \$100 million that disappeared when Ontario rashly withdrew from the Western Climate Initiative cap and trade system and its climate action plan. Again, a case of ideology trumping sound public policy.

To say the least, then, the omens are troubling.

So, what are we to do under the current political circumstances? You may have heard me say before that we need to take a mature approach to politics in Ontario. You may have heard me say we need to talk to and try to form productive relationships with decision-makers of all stripes, not because we like them but because they need to know our members' interests. I've said we must attempt to move them from wherever they are currently to somewhere closer to our position. What you haven't heard me say before today is that while we will try, I don't know if any of those approaches will make a damn bit of difference.

There is a phrase I first heard during Mike Harris' rule and early indications are that it may be as appropriate now as it was then. The Harris regime was rightly accused of being a government that knew the price of everything and the value of nothing. If that is equally true of this new government, then consultation, if it even happens, will be hollow. If they refuse to see that

publicly-funded education is an investment in the province's future and not a mere expense, we will need to defend our work in other ways.

But, first things first. The PE has once again engaged the services of Sussex Strategy Group to provide strategic and, especially, government relations assistance. You may recall that they were helpful to us in the build-up to and during the very significant strikes that arose from the 2014 round of bargaining. We will look to use their particular expertise and connections to defend and advance our members' interests wherever that is possible. Perhaps, just perhaps, with Sussex' assistance, we can persuade the government that there are aspects of publicly-funded education that lie outside the ideological arena and that we can productively advance together. Surely no politician anywhere on the political spectrum is **for** violence in schools or violence against our members. Just as no decision-maker should be against the exercise of professional judgment in the interests of improved educational outcomes. And one can't be "for the people" and against the provision of the whole range of services our members provide to the people's children.

We are, as I have said before, entirely willing to establish a meaningful dialogue through which to advocate for the interests of OSSTF/FEESO members and the interests of publicly-funded education.

But we will be absolutely firm and resolute in the defence of those interests should the government move in any direction that poses a threat.

We will need to be vigilant about the gains we have made regarding violence in our workplaces. We have not come as far as we need to, but the commitments made by the Ministers of Education and Labour at our final Provincial Council meeting of 2017 were not insignificant.

To get there required a concerted and intense effort on our part, including a Lobby Day where local leaders talked to 93 of the 106 sitting MPPs. Most of them were frankly taken aback by the stories we told them about what is going on in our classrooms and our workplaces.

But now, of course, there is a new government. Well more than half of the MPPs in the legislature, mostly on the government benches, are brand new. And we have to assume that they know very little—if anything—about the issue of violence in education workplaces.

We will need to resist any impulse on the part to the government to move backwards on this issue or abandon the commitments made by the previous government. We will need to work even harder if we're going to see the kind of progress we really need to see.

And we won't relent until every one of our members can go to work every day without fear of being subjected to violence.

We need to be vigilant, as well, about the gains we've made regarding the recognition of professional judgment and collaborative professionalism.

These gains were a long time coming. They were worth celebrating when we achieved them, and they still are. But we have known from the outset that commitments on paper are only a good first step—that they will become truly meaningful only when we succeed in changing the culture of our workplaces. Ministry initiatives have been eroding the role of our professional judgment for decades, and we have only just begun to turn that long-established trend around.

We cannot and we must not allow a change in government to undo those gains. We must and we will continue to reclaim and assert our professionalism at every opportunity.

And who knows—I'm not holding my breath, but perhaps this is an area where we can find some common ground with the new government. Premier Ford is fond of saying that he wants to hear from front-line workers. Well, when it comes to education, we *are* the voice of front-line workers, and if the Premier wants to talk to us about our work in education, we'll be more than happy to sit down with him.

We'll be happy to explain that any world-class education system values the expertise of its professionals.

We'll be happy to explain why education workers on the front lines should *always* be consulted and given an opportunity to collaborate in the planning of initiatives. That we should be trusted to make decisions about instructional approach, and to determine the most appropriate methods for assessment and evaluation.

We'll be happy to illustrate for him that our knowledge, our expertise and our professional judgment are this province's most valuable assets when it comes to publicly-funded education.

And we'll impress upon him that for all of these reasons, we deserve to be treated fairly and respectfully when we enter bargaining next year.

But, of course, we may well discover that the Premier, despite his proclamations about front-line workers, isn't really interested in hearing from us at all.

The fact is, it's difficult to know exactly what to expect from this government.

Several times during the election campaign, Mr. Ford insisted that he would be able to cut six billion dollars from the provincial budget—and that figure doesn't include all the tax cuts he's promised—without imposing any job losses.

I don't know what kind of calculator the Premier is using, but I think it's an understatement to suggest that his math is a little suspect.

On a side note, though, if this government is looking for true "efficiencies", we could certainly make a suggestion or two, beginning with the billion or so dollars they could save every year by moving to one public school system in each official language. And a central bargaining table restricted to a few specific items need not be the bloated, inefficient behemoth it proved to be last time.

But however they go about it, if the government is serious about fulfilling its campaign promises to remove billions from the provincial budget, that will not bode well for education or for any other public undertaking funded by the government of Ontario. But we can certainly agree that there should be no job losses and will be happy to see that promise fulfilled. In fact, we'll be happy to fight for its fulfillment.

You know, we have been accused of fighting with governments from across the political spectrum. It is true and we should make no apologies. Within the span of my own career, when Bob Rae ripped open legal contracts, when Mike Harris deliberately created a crisis in education, when Dalton McGuinty trampled on our members' charter rights, when Kathleen Wynne allowed school boards to run amok at bargaining tables, we fought back as was right. Should the Ford government wish to listen to the advice of professionals in the field, from JK to University, we will work with them. Should they refuse, we will do what is necessary. And make no mistake, we will do so in concert with the broader labour movement, through the Ontario Federation of Labour, and we will do everything we can to work cooperatively with the education affiliates. We will need to find allies wherever they may be, and through the upcoming municipal elections we should seek to create allies as well. Electing trustees who will stand up for publicly-funded education is crucial.

And with that as a backdrop, we have to anticipate that the next rounds of bargaining, both for our school board members and our university sector members, may be very, very difficult.

Over the coming months we will be moving ahead with our preparations for central and local bargaining for the school board sector.

We will engage the processes for bargaining preparation, including a survey regarding the central/local split, priorities surveys, brief preparation and approval, and look forward to the new Protective Services Committee's contributions to this work.

We cannot afford to make any assumptions about what to expect at the bargaining table, or what other measures the government might have in mind that will affect bargaining.

We need to be ready to adjust our approach and change our tactics in response to whatever the government has in store for us. But while our tactics may need to change, the goal will remain consistent, and that is to achieve the best possible outcome for our members and for public education in Ontario.

Of course, for our university sector members in District 35, bargaining is not tied to a provincial process or common timelines, and three of our D35 Bargaining Units have been engaged in negotiations over the summer.

Congratulations to our members at the University of Guelph, who reached a tentative agreement on July 25. The membership has ratified the agreement, and we expect the University's Board of Governors to do the same this week.

Our members at Brock University have also been in negotiations since the spring. The bargaining team there will be entering conciliation in early September, armed with a strong 92.6 per cent strike vote from the membership. We will be supporting the local team through the Provincial Resumption of Negotiations process and we know the entire Federation is behind them.

And our newest District 35 members at Saint Paul University in Ottawa are currently in bargaining for a first collective agreement.

As with all other sectors, we recognize that, beyond what we are able to achieve at the bargaining table, the working lives of our university sector members are also impacted by government policy.

For years we lobbied the previous government to do something about university funding in Ontario. And we tried to impress upon that government that there is an alarming lack of meaningful oversight with regard to the ways universities spend the funding that they do receive.

Every year at AMPA, in fact, we make no small effort to arrange a face-to-face meeting between our delegates from District 35 and the Minister responsible for universities.

Our delegates have met with every single one of the last six Ministers holding the post-secondary portfolio, and they have pointed out to every one of those Ministers that Ontario, embarrassingly, continues to rank dead last among Canadian provinces in per-student funding for universities.

We have told those Ministers that university funding not only needs to be increased to a realistic level and stabilized so that programs are maintained year over year, but that the funding needs to be targeted to specific programs and services. It needs to be targeted so that universities are not able to starve critical student services by side-tracking available funding to other priorities and pet projects.

Every one of those Ministers listened politely, but in the end the only significant extra funding that was made available to the university sector came in the form of subsidies for students' tuitions.

Now I'm sure, given that Ontario's tuition rates are the highest in Canada, that the students very much appreciated those subsidies.

But let me draw a comparison here. We do not, and we never will, support the diversion of funding from our public schools to voucher programs. As we've seen in many US jurisdictions, those kinds of initiatives serve only to destabilize, diminish, and ultimately destroy public education.

But that's essentially what our government does when it chooses tuition subsidies over adequate, stable funding for universities.

Students shouldn't need tuition subsidies because properly-funded universities wouldn't have to rely so heavily on student fees.

Properly-funded universities also wouldn't feel the need to cut programs and services, and lay off our members, every time there's a minor fluctuation in enrolment. Until sufficient, stable, transparent funding for universities is achieved, then, our work in this area continues.

Before I close, I want to thank all of you for being here over these next two-and-a-half days.

J'aimerais tous vous remercier d'être présents pendant les deux journées et demie à venir.

One important aspect of Leadership, of course, is the opportunity to re-acquaint ourselves and spend some social time with colleagues and friends from around the province.

But it's also, for most of you, a forfeiture of some precious summer down-time in exchange for hours spent in mostly windowless rooms that are inevitably too hot, too cold, too small, too large, all in the interest of becoming better leaders in your Districts and Bargaining Units.

Not particularly exciting on the surface, but it would honestly be difficult for me to emphasize too strongly how important your desire to become better leaders is to the health of this Federation.

Strong local leadership is the very foundation of our union. And by continuing to build our capacity for adept leadership at the local level, we ensure we will continue to be effective in the years to come. Because strong local leadership today also ensures our *future* capacity for strong provincial leadership, and for the kind of expertise and proficiency required for able representation at the provincial level.

Of course, the best way to build the skills you need to be strong local leaders is through experience—experience at the local bargaining table, experience representing and advocating for members, first-hand experience dealing with difficult situations.

And I suspect the coming years will bring no shortage of difficult situations. In fact, that is probably the main point I ask that you take away with you when this conference is done. We will all need to do our best, through outreach, influence, and the persuasive presentation of our goals for the education system in Ontario, to find a peaceful path forward. But if we are rebuffed, if we are attacked, if the publicly-funded education system that is the foundation stone of a robust and inclusive democracy in this province is besieged, we will do what is in our power to defend ourselves and it. We will do that without empty sloganeering and with intelligence and unwavering resolve and we will do it fiercely. In other words, it is very possible that there is nothing on offer in the foreseeable future but our very own version of blood, toil, tears, and sweat. It has been so before and it likely will be again. But we will not be the generation of leaders that fails to stand up when times get hard. Like me, most of you will not have secured a career in education in order to become a unionist. But once here, we inherit an obligation to be stewards of publicly-funded education because no one knows it better and no one is in a better position to fight for it. If called upon, we will answer.

This conference, then, is an important complement to that first-hand experience you will continue to gain—an opportunity to absorb practical information, to examine tactics and strategies, and broaden the scope of your expertise.

So thank you for taking the time to be here this week to do this important work. I hope you all have a productive and enjoyable Leadership 2018.