

QP BRIEFING

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1). *HEARD: EVERYBODY LOVES THE SCARBOROUGH SUBWAY EXTENSION*

By: Geoff Zochodne

As Toronto city council debated the Scarborough subway extension again on Tuesday, there was no party at Queen's Park willing to dissent with the costly, one-stop plan.

The subway project is now proposed as a \$3.35-billion, 6.5-kilometre, single-stop link between eastern Toronto and the Scarborough Town Centre. But Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca said the Liberal government is still on board with the project, along with \$1.48 billion in provincial funding.

"We remain completely committed to the project and understand and respect ... the municipal process, not just in Toronto, but in every community in the GTHA," said Del Duca on Tuesday. "But our money is there."

PC Leader Patrick Brown sent out a statement Monday trumpeting the Tories' support for subways in Scarborough, where all three parties are traditionally competitive and where the 2018 provincial election will be hotly contested.

"The Wynne Liberals love to talk about the subway extension during by-elections, but so far all the people of Scarborough have seen are more empty and broken promises," Brown declared. "When it comes to the Scarborough subway talk is cheap. The people want to see action. It's time to put shovels in the ground and give Scarborough the subway it deserves."

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath took a more cautious approach, but agreed that it is time to get on with it.

"For a long time now, we've certainly said that Scarborough residents need to have their transit issues dealt with," said Horwath, who took a trip into Toronto from Scarborough using the TTC last summer as part of the NDP's ultimately unsuccessful campaign in the Scarborough-Rouge River byelection.

"We'll see where that lands," Horwath added. "But the problem is, every time the plan gets changed, you drag out the actual implementation by another couple of years. I think that's the worrisome thing is that these folks have been waiting for an awful long time to have their transit situation dealt with."

2). QUEEN'S PARK BEING PUSHED ON CONSCIENCE RIGHTS FOR DOCTOR-ASSISTED DYING BILL

By: Geoff Zochodne

A number of doctors and health-care professionals are prescribing that Queen's Park enshrine in law their right to refuse taking part in assisted dying for reasons of conscience and religion.

They want that protection, however, in a housekeeping bill — but the Health Minister doesn't sound inclined to add any language around conscience rights to the legislation.

The legislature's finance and economic affairs committee has been meeting recently for public hearings on Bill 84, the Medical Assistance in Dying Statute Law Amendment Act. The legislation tweaks existing legislation and rules to accommodate assisted dying, which was legalized by the federal government last year.

"My belief is that killing is immoral," said Dr. Nora Pope, a Toronto naturopath, during a March 23 committee meeting. "I don't want to be an accessory to killing by being forced to refer patients to [medically assistance in dying]."

Bill 84 would provide legal protection for doctors and nurses who help with assisted dying and updates freedom of information and privacy laws. The bill also makes it illegal to deny benefits such as insurance payouts to someone who is contractually entitled to them but who has also received medical assistance in dying.

But there is no mention of conscience rights in the bill, which has made doctors and health groups uneasy. Increasing their discomfort is that the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario expects doctors who don't want to provide assisted dying to instead offer patients an "effective referral" to a health-care provider who will.

"When we are required to participate in the destruction of someone's life, we are being asked to close the book on a patient when there may in fact be more chapters to be written," said Larry Worthen, a representative of the Coalition for HealthCARE and Conscience, at the March 23 committee meeting. The coalition includes several Christian-related health-care groups.

The Ontario government has created a clinician referral service to help doctors make the referrals. The province is also working on a "care co-ordination service" that would act as a concierge for patients and health professionals trying to navigate end-of-life services.

Health Minister Eric Hoskins said Tuesday at Queen's Park that the federal legislation governing medical assistance in dying recognizes conscience rights and religion, but didn't commit to the same sort of language being added to Bill 84.

"I've said that in the legislature as well; that we respect the right of physicians, nurse practitioners and others to not participate for reasons of conscience or morals, ethics, religious reasons," Hoskins told reporters. "We've taken measures and are continuing to take measures."

Maureen Aslin, the executive director for End of Life Planning Canada, told the finance committee that she was concerned there was nothing in the bill about conscience rights. Her concerns arise, however, because she is still hearing of doctors refusing to provide an effective referral.

“In addition, we think that physicians should be required to make their conscientious objector status publicly known, so that patients can have this information as they look for a physician, or if they are already a patient and they do not know this information in advance,” Aslin said.

Shanaaz Gokool, CEO of Dying With Dignity Canada, said if MPPs add a passage on conscience rights to the bill, “we strongly recommend that such a clause should reflect a fair balance between a patient’s right to compassionate care and a physician’s right to conscience or religious objection.”

Dr. Janice Halpern, a psychiatrist with B’nai Brith Canada’s League for Human Rights, said that objecting doctors “need protection from our own regulatory body, which is demanding something that no other province and no other country requires of their physicians: mandatory referral.”

“The Supreme Court requested, and our federal government reiterated, that the rights of patients and physicians should be reconciled,” she added. “Everyone else has done it. It can’t be so difficult.”

Dr. John Scott, a palliative care physician from Ottawa, told the committee he has had 10 patients who have requested assisted dying. He too wanted conscience rights in Bill 84.

“I think a lot of people do not recognize what a referral is for a physician,” Scott said. “It’s not just giving an idea or sending a little note.”

Public hearings on Bill 84 are scheduled to continue on Thursday.

3). *THE FUNDING PORTAL – WEEK OF MARCH 20*

By: Sabrina Nanji

Funding for the week of March 20, 2017 under Canadian federal and provincial grants and business incentive programs reached \$892.5 million, up from \$808.4 million during the previous week.

Top Sector. Academic & Research is the top sector this week, attracting \$749.5 million, 84 per cent of total incentives.

Top Region. Alberta is the top province this week, securing \$425.1 million, accounting for 48 per cent of total national disbursements this week.

Top Recipients in Ontario.

Sheridan College receives \$67.7 million to expand its Hazel McCallion Campus in Mississauga.

Queensway Carleton Hospital receives \$480,000 from the Health Infrastructure Renewal Funding.

Sectors

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Provinces

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4). LIBERALS DEFEND HYDRO ONE PRIVATIZATION AS EXECUTIVE PAY HITS 'ASTRONOMICAL NEW HIGHS'

By: Geoff Zochodne

The Liberal government is standing by its decision to sell off up to 60 per cent of Hydro One to investors – even after it was revealed the CEO of the now-privatized utility earned nearly \$4.5 million last year, when public outrage over electricity prices was also reaching new highs.

The company published the information this week, ahead of its annual shareholder meeting in May. The information had previously been available via the province's "Sunshine List," but the government exempted Hydro One from the disclosure rules as part of the privatization process.

The management information circular shows Hydro One president and CEO Mayo Schmidt earned \$850,000 in salary in 2016, as well as \$2,379,948 in shares, \$1,170,000 in bonuses (that were more shares), \$64,024 in pension money and \$20,081 in other compensation. The 2016 compensation for Schmidt and four other executives topped \$11 million, according to Hydro One's published figures.

Hydro One said in an email that the pay packages reflect the company's "need to attract and retain the highest level of expertise in a marketplace where we're competing for talent with large private-sector companies across the country." Hydro One also said that the majority of the CEO's compensation is based on meeting "aggressive and very specific performance targets" and that the company's new management has cut costs by more than what it is they're being paid.

But the compensation numbers were unveiled as voter discontent over hydro rates continues, and after the Liberal government had to put out fires sparked by proposed executive pay packages in the broader public sector.

Once word of the executive pay got out, Progressive Conservative energy critic Todd Smith said Hydro One compensation had "hit astronomical new highs," and that it was "a slap in the face" for which the Liberals were to blame.

"Both the cut-offs and the new sky-high salaries at Hydro One are a direct result of this government's actions," said Smith in a statement. "We now know why Hydro One salaries were removed from the Sunshine List. The government doesn't want the people of Ontario to know that their rates have helped create a new Millionaire's Club at Hydro One."

It had been previously projected that Schmidt would take home compensation in the neighbourhood of \$4 million. In 2015, after his appointment in August and as the government was preparing to privatize Hydro One, Schmidt earned approximately \$1.36 million in total compensation. In 2014, when Hydro One was still entirely in public hands, its CEO made \$728,571 in compensation, the province's sunshine list shows.

Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault said Tuesday it was on shareholders to keep an eye on the company's executive pay – even though Ontario still owns about 70 per cent of Hydro One. The Liberal government intends to whittle that stake down to about 40 per cent.

"It's a publicly traded company now and so the shareholders involved in this will have to judge where they see their CEO taking the company," said Thibeault at Queen's Park. "They are a better-run company since we've brought forward the IPO."

Hydro One, which runs almost all of Ontario's electricity transmission grid, is being sold off to private investors in chunks by the Liberal government. Thus far, about 30 per cent of the formerly public utility has been sold in stock offerings, in return for approximately \$3.8 billion in proceeds. The most recent share sale was last spring.

Premier Kathleen Wynne has defended the stock offerings sales as necessary to fund infrastructure projects and pay down debt left over from the old Ontario Hydro. The Liberals have also rolled out a new "Fair Hydro Plan" they're counting on to reduce customer's electricity bills by an average total of 25 per cent, albeit including a previously announced 8-per-cent rebate.

But the Hydro One privatization has prompted some public backlash. Wynne, during a phone call earlier this month with a Sturgeon Falls ratepayer that media were invited to watch, was asked about the Hydro One CEO's \$4-million compensation. The Premier responded that that was "the outer limit of what he would make."

Thibeault said Hydro One has stepped up its game in the customer service department, particularly in turning the power back on for customers who have been disconnected in the dead of winter. The Energy Minister also touted the government's hydro relief plan as proof that it was taking the electricity pains seriously.

"So people won't have to worry about ... scraping by. We recognize that some people are having difficulty with their hydro bills," Thibeault said. "But when it comes to Hydro One, the Ontario Securities Commission now requires that they get their finances in order to publicly disclose all of those pieces."

Both the NDP and PCs called for an end to the Hydro One share sales during Tuesday's question period, after The Canadian Press had reported that internal government polling showed longstanding public opposition to privatizing the company.

The NDP have actually proposed buying back the utility's shares if they form government in 2018. The policy is part of a plan to reduce hydro bills that NDP Leader Andrea Horwath says all parties should support. To that end, on Tuesday, Horwath moved an opposition day motion in the legislature.

"The privatization of our hydro system began under the Progressive Conservatives and clearly the torch has been successfully passed to this Liberal government," Horwath said. "But overwhelmingly, the people of this province, an overwhelming majority of Ontarians have made it clear that they want a public hydro system."

"[Horwath's] proposal would either keep electricity bills at the same cost or increase them, and the issue she raises today, the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One, would not take one cent off one person's electricity bill in this province," responded Wynne in question period. "We made a very difficult decision around the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One in order to build the infrastructure that this province needs in every corner of the province, infrastructure that will allow people to move themselves, their families, their goods more quickly and will allow this economy to thrive."

Asked if the plan was still to sell Ontario's stake in Hydro One down to 40 per cent, Thibeault said "nothing's changed."

5). *LIBERALS CRITICIZE EMBATTLED PC MPP JACK MACLAREN FOR 'MISOGYNIST' COMMENTS*

By: Sabrina Nanji

For the third time in a week, the Liberals criticized the Progressive Conservatives for what they say are sexist remarks and actions, and a clear sign that something is rotten in the Tory camp.

The Grits' latest blow was delivered in Tuesday's Question Period, when a Liberal backbencher asked Health Minister Eric Hoskins about a proposed "zero-tolerance policy" for sexual abuse of patients, which PC MPP Jack MacLaren had called "dangerous" and "going overboard" during second-reading debate of Bill 87, the Protecting Patients Act, the previous evening.

The Liberal Caucus Service Bureau and MacLaren (the MPP for Carleton-Mississippi Mills) then promptly issued statements within seconds of each other – MacLaren pointing out he retracted his comments earlier on his website, while the Liberals pointed out it was the second "insensitive incident" by a PC MPP in seven days. (More on this below.)

MacLaren – who was ordered to undergo sensitivity training last year by PC Leader Patrick Brown after making a crude joke about a female MP – apologized and clarified his remarks to reporters later, saying he made "a mistake" and "unequivocally support[s] a zero-tolerance policy for sexual assaults and abuse."

"I regret very much my choice of words yesterday and I assure you it will never happen again," MacLaren said, adding his wife and three daughters are nurses. "All I meant was we're all entitled to be considered to be innocent until proven guilty, and the trouble with zero tolerance is, sometimes, it can be an abuse of over zealousness to punish people, and doctors are deserving of respect for the most part."

Asked if he needed to go back for more sensitivity training, he said he didn't think so, and that he understood the errors of his ways. "I'll be much more careful in the future about choosing my words."

Brown, who had not yet had a chance to speak with MacLaren Tuesday morning, said he was "disappointed" in MacLaren's remarks, which did not reflect his party's position.

"He needs to think more carefully about his words ... It can't happen again, and Jack knows that," Brown said. "I would have hoped that he would have learned his lesson; I know he spent quality time in the sensitivity training, and with his family. [He] seemed sincere, and I hope that is still the case."

The Tory Leader could not commit to ordering his MPP to remedial training. "For starters, he needs to go back home and talk to his family and think about his words, and make sure this doesn't happen again," Brown said.

But deputy premier Deb Matthews – who happens to be co-captain of the Liberals' 2018 re-election effort – said it was clear MacLaren had not learned his lesson. "I don't know if there's such thing as remedial sensitivity training," she quipped.

"This is a throwback to another era when misogynist opinions were the norm ... This isn't the first time for Jack MacLaren – we're seeing a real pattern," Matthews said. "Patrick Brown has to

deal with the rogue members of his caucus who continue to be a throwback to an era that, frankly, I thought was behind us.”

This is the third time this week the Liberals have fired shots at the PCs for sexist comments or purported actions.

On Monday, the Grits wrongly claimed Brown was set to speak at the Cambridge Club, a men-only athletic facility, that the Tories swiftly debunked. Brown is actually set to talk at the Toronto Athletic Club Wednesday, a co-ed venue, that is owned by the same company as the Cambridge Club.

Matthews stood by Status of Women Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris’ earlier criticism, saying that Brown was still speaking as part of the Cambridge Club’s Speaker Series, which lacked judgment. “We can split hairs if you want,” she told reporters. “The Cambridge Club is a men-only club and they’re the ones who have organized this event.”

Asked if this was part of a deliberate strategy to publicly brand the PCs as misogynist, Matthews said: “People have a right to know what the attitudes within that party are.”

Brown fired back that, when it comes to his Athletic Club speech, the Liberals knew “they were stretching there.”

“This is the Liberals uncomfortable with their own record and looking for opportunities to attack others,” he said.

Meanwhile, at a committee meeting last week, PC MPP Randy Pettapiece was taken to task by Liberal MPP Daiene Vernile when he told Rumina Velshi, an accomplished engineer recently appointed to the Ontario Energy Board, to “go to the kitchen and get them to do something about this coffee.”

Pettapiece apologized to Velshi after that meeting, and formally apologized and withdrew his remarks when the committee convened again Tuesday morning. (Pettapiece still seems adamant the quality of the legislature’s coffee is sub-par.)

But NDP Leader Andrea Horwath, whose own caucus blasted MacLaren’s comments during Monday evening’s debate in the house, said the Liberals should take a look in the mirror. She pointed to former energy minister Bob Chiarelli, who was accused of being sexist when he was dismissive of the Auditor General, a woman, after she tabled her 2014 report on smart meters.

“The Liberals are living in a glass house when it comes to these kinds of issues,” Horwath said. “We need to be thoughtful about where the stones are being thrown from and the problems that the Premier has in her own caucus.”

“Obviously Mr. Brown has some work to do to deal with his members ... But the bottom line is, it’s not acceptable for anybody to have those kinds of attitudes in this day and age in this legislature,” Horwath said.

Bill 87 – which sparked the MacLaren controversy – would expand the list of sexual abuse definitions for which a physician’s certificate could be revoked, including the “touching of the patient’s genitals, anus, breasts or buttocks.”

Hoskins said the proposed legislation would “strengthen and reinforce the zero-tolerance policy” when it comes to sexual abuse of patients. The Health Minister also said the changes in the bill are based on the recommendations made by a sexual assault task force that was struck “in the wake of troubling and high-profile cases of patient sexual abuse.”

However, some doctors, including the Ontario Medical Association, have raised concerns that the proposed amendments may dissuade some physicians from performing certain procedures, such as a breast exam, that could lead to what they say is an unfair process, as that they should be considered innocent until proven guilty.

Doctors are also concerned that they would be subject to a patient’s perception of what constitutes abuse, rather than explicit abuse, and in some cases when it isn’t warranted, during routine procedures.