

QP BRIEFING

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1). AN INSIDE LOOK AT SAM OOSTERHOFF'S PUSH TO PASS HIS FIRST BILL, ON PALLIATIVE CARE

By: David Hains

Sam Oosterhoff is ready for his closeup.

Elected in 2016, the 20-year-old who represents Niagara West-Glanbrook took some time adjusting to his new job. Now, the youngest MPP in Ontario's history is trying to steer a private member's bill on palliative care through Queen's Park, with second reading scheduled for Thursday. It's a far cry from his previous roles as a political staffer on Parliament Hill or a student at Brock University.

In his office adorned by 19th-century military portraits, the oft-excitabile Oosterhoff rattles off reasons why developing a detailed framework for palliative care makes sense.

"It's about choice, it's about compassion, it's about human dignity, it's about cost-savings, clearing up wait times. The list goes on," he says, arguing it's an issue that should appeal to all political parties. "It's a good step towards addressing end-of-life care in the province of Ontario."

Oosterhoff's bill would create a more detailed framework for palliative care in the province. He says there's no agreed-upon definition, a lack of statistics and data, a lack of education among health-care professionals, and additional policies need to be fleshed out. He argues that Ontario needs more palliative care beds — there are currently 341 beds, about one-fourth of the goal — but his bill doesn't call for any additional funding, as he knows that would be difficult to pass in a private member's bill.

He explains he's familiar with palliative care for a number of reasons, including McNally House Hospice in his riding, his Dutch background (the Netherlands is a leading country on the issue), reading national studies on the subject as a Parliamentary staffer, and his friend Pieter Harsevoort.

The latter resonates personally: Harsevoort, the brother of a friend, lived with ALS, and Oosterhoff says his end-of-life care benefited from palliative support.

"He was someone who blessed the lives of those around him," Oosterhoff says, of the former grade school teacher. "He was someone who was such a strong advocate for palliative care as a means of granting people the time with their family, friends, and loved ones before the death that we're all going to experience at some point."

Harsevoort passed away at age 32 in January 2017.

Oosterhoff is hoping to build on lessons learned from Harsevoort and others through his private member's bill. In so doing, he's also learning what it takes to make an idea reality in Queen's Park from the opposition benches.

As a first step, he's tried to take the politics out of the issue to build as broad a coalition as possible.

"If you approach things from a non-partisan perspective, you can sometimes get very interesting endorsements from all sorts of people." He cites a number of health organizations backing the bill, and encouraging words he has heard from members of the NDP and Liberals, adding that he's "cautiously optimistic."

The consensus building is a contrast to the initial perception of Oosterhoff when he first took office, as political observers largely viewed him as a polarizing far right wing religious conservative.

"It got a little out of hand when I was first elected. Between speculation, hearsay, misattribution, there was a willingness to put me in a particular box with a particular label," he says.

Oosterhoff doesn't deny his conservative credentials, but prefers the term "comprehensive conservative," which he argues is more nuanced and varied than a stereotype. Several times in the 30-minute interview he uses the word "compassion," both to refer to a broader PC philosophy and the merits of supporting palliative care.

"Tories don't always do a good job of expressing themselves as the party of compassion," he says, arguing issues such as palliative care should be a natural fit for the party.

His arguments on palliative care and tending to end-of-life care go beyond policy white papers and a lack of statistics.

"My faith informs my perspective on human value," he says. "The least I can do is in my work as an elected official do my best to show compassion to those I interact with."

He adds that seeing his bill pass second reading the last day the house sits until it breaks would be a treat; it's all he wants for Christmas.

2). *A BILL TO BAN TICKET BOTS PASSES AMID DISCORDANT NOTES ON ITS EFFECTIVENESS*

By: Christopher Reynolds

The house passed a bill to get tough on digital scalpers Wednesday, voting 50-43 for legislation to ban ticket bots and cap the resale price of tickets at 50 per cent above their face value.

The Liberals backed Bill 166, while Progressive Conservative and NDP legislators voted against it.

Among other measures, the act aims to level a stage tipped toward bots — technology that can gobble up swathes of tickets in seconds — as showcased by the feeding frenzy over Tragically Hip tickets in 2016. Resale companies and industry insiders also reaped the windfall, leaving fans footing the bill for major mark-ups.

Attorney General Yasir Naqvi said the cap on resale prices strips the financial incentive for online scalpers in a "distorted market."

"You've got these people — by way of technology — scooping a large amount of tickets, creating an artificial supply crunch in the market and then dumping these tickets at much higher prices," he said Wednesday. "There is no one magic bullet dealing with the issue. That's why, after much consultation, we have brought a suite of options dealing with issues around both access and transparency."

Critics say the price cap will simply stoke the black market and push online resale to shadowy sites based abroad, where prosecution of violators would be much harder. The new law has also snipped a key transparency provision from an earlier version of the bill, bowing to both small-market venues and colossal ticket sale companies such as Ticketmaster.

The original bill required vendors to disclose the number of tickets available to the public compared with the total capacity of the venue. The aim was to expose how many tickets organizers, venues or promoters were withholding from public consumption for resale to industry insiders — considered a factor in sky-high ticket prices. That clause was cut in committee last month, however.

Naqvi said input from artists and cultural organizations concerned about the impact on smaller venues and markets prompted the change. Full disclosure of a venue's capacity alongside a relatively small number of tickets for sale could scare away artists concerned about playing to a half-empty hall — even if many of the seats were covered or blocked, as routinely happens at the Air Canada Centre, for example.

"If you live in Windsor, the only option available to you should not be to drive to Toronto to hear a big act," Naqvi told reporters. "We don't want to create a disincentive for these big names, or mid-size market names, to say, 'This is just too risky for me, it's bad for my brand, I'm just going to go to Toronto, that's where I'm going to perform and I don't care about Windsor anymore.'"

Ticket companies and opposition MPPs opposed the cutting of the clause on ticket supply.

"You should be able to know how many tickets are available for an event, what your seats will look like, and how much you're going to pay for them. Only in that circumstance can you make a purchase that you truly feel good about," said resale site StubHub in a release Wednesday.

PC MPP Vic Fedeli said the change benefits "Liberal insiders" and hurts ordinary consumers. "At the last moment, the Liberals put in their own amendment ... So now this bill that's supposed to make ticket sale transparent is now even less transparent than when they started," he told reporters.

Catherine Moore, an adjunct professor at the University of Toronto's faculty of music, credited the government last June with a swift reaction to last summer's bot scourge. But she said prosecution could be difficult unless governments around the world adopt "enforcement methods and networks" parallel to those used for money laundering.

StubHub argues the price cap will drive ticket sales away from platforms with "robust consumer protections" and toward unregulated channels, without successfully lowering prices.

"The fact is, if a venue holds 20,000 fans, but 100,000 fans want to attend the performance, ticket prices will reflect that demand. If the established market rate exceeds the 50-per-cent cap established by government, those sales won't stop or adapt to reflect the price caps," the company stated. "It will happen on street corners where the risk of counterfeit and fraud is significant, and no guarantees are in place; or it will happen on ticket resale websites located outside of jurisdiction of the Ontario government."

Under the new Strengthening Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, vendors will have to disclose all fees up front, as with airlines. Resale companies, meanwhile, must disclose the original value of the ticket and identity of the reseller. That way, buyers can see if they are paying more than 50 per cent of the initial price and, if so, pursue legal action.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath found "significant failings" in the bill, and said she was "totally disappointed."

"We're leaving families in situations where they might not be able to take the kids to the hockey game because either they won't be able to access tickets, or the tickets will have been inflated in price, again, to a point where they can't be afforded," she said.

Individual scofflaws could face fines of up to \$50,000 and imprisonment for up to two years less a day, according to the Attorney General's office. Companies running bots and excessive markups could see penalties of up to \$250,000. The threat of "administrative monetary penalties" looms at up to \$10,000 per violation, according to a spokesperson.

Enforcement will occur through the consumer protection branch of the Ministry of Government Services and Consumer Protection, with teams empowered to investigate online, take complaints and lay fines, Naqvi said. "We're not requiring our police to investigate those types of issues," he said.

MPP Sophie Kiwala, who whose riding includes Kingston — the Hip's hometown and the site of their final show on their sold-out 2016 tour — introduced a private member's bill last year focused on ticket resale reform that passed second reading unanimously before being incorporated into government legislation this year. She noted last summer how "disappointing it

was to see tickets that were literally snapped up in seconds, and by unscrupulous means, and then resold at exorbitant prices.”

A state in Australia moved in October to ban ticket bots and inflated resale prices. In New York state, scalpers caught using bots can face harsh fines or jail time. At home, Alberta scrapped scalper laws in 2009, but in Quebec, those caught scalping tickets that cost more than the original could face prosecution.

Last spring, nearly 90 per cent of respondents to the government’s consultation survey said there should be a price cap for resale markups in order to create a disincentive for scalpers.

3). LIBERALS LAGGING IN THIRD PLACE IN 2017 FUNDRAISING RACE

By: Jessica Smith Cross

With time running out before the end of the year, the Ontario Liberal Party appears to be lagging in the fundraising race — while Patrick Brown's Progressive Conservatives have raised more than the Grits and NDP combined.

As of Nov. 28, the PCs had raised \$2,069,860.75, the NDP \$914,350.10 and the Ontario Liberals \$773,460.84, according to the real-time disclosure of political contributions on Election Ontario's website.

In an unusual turn of events, the NDP has been beating the Liberals in fundraising all year — posting a \$215,790.66 lead over the governing party as of the end of October — but the Grits appear to have a shot at catching up.

The parties have 10 business days after a donation is deposited to inform Elections Ontario of it, and Elections Ontario has two days to update its real-time contributions website. While the NDP and PCs don't have any posted information about contributions deposited since Nov. 28, the Liberals do, and it shows they've raised at least another \$231,534.04 in the past two weeks alone.

Ontario NDP provincial secretary and executive director Karla Webber-Gallagher tells QP Briefing she believes her party is also raising that much these days.

"Year-end fundraising is certainly the most important time, and the numbers that we come out with at the end of this will give us a sense of what we'll be able to do next year," she said. "It typically tends to account for a much more significant amount of our fundraising than any other time of year."

The end of the year is good for all parties, she said, as it's the last chance for donors to get closer to the donation limit it's closer to tax time, when they'll receive a refund on their donation.

This year is the first under the new campaign finance rules, which banned corporate and union donations and put a \$1,200 limit on campaign donations to the central party for the year — down from \$9,975, with a loophole where donors could reach the limit again in elections and byelections, which has since been closed.

(Today, donors can donate an additional \$1,200, in total, to candidates in a campaign period, and another \$1,200, in total, to constituency associations and/or nomination contestants, in a single calendar year. These donations are not captured on Elections Ontario's real-time disclosure website.)

Webber-Gallagher said the party has always known the changes were good for the NDP.

Indeed, the new law appears have reduced what the PCs and Liberals have raised to a greater degree than the NDP, which has tended to rely on smaller donations. So far this year, the New Democrats have more than 6,000 individual donors and the PCs have almost that many — more than twice as many as the Liberals.

Last year, the PCs raised a whopping \$12,924,953, the Liberals \$6,309,082 and the NDP \$3,718,010.

To make up for the dip in donations, the new election law includes a quarterly allowance for the parties, based on the number of valid votes their candidates received in the previous general election. This year, the Green Party is receiving \$630,638, the NDP \$3,104,757, the PCs \$4,091,895 and the Liberal Party \$5,055,097.

Both the NDP and the PCs see their 2017 fundraising numbers so far as signs of support for their parties.

"We are seeing Andrea just connecting in communities in a way that I think is amazing," Webber-Gallagher said, referring to Leader Andrea Horwath.

"I think there's something really exciting happening in the grassroots," she said. "We're letting Andrea be Andrea and the results are that people are really quite inspired by her — I think a lot of it has to do with that."

PC MPP Vic Fedeli said it shows people are supportive of the party and its leader.

"People are obviously prepared for a Patrick Brown PC government," he said.

As for the Liberals' fundraising slowdown, he took it as a sign people are distancing themselves from the Liberal brand.

No one from the Liberal party was available to comment on this story Wednesday.

4). IN BRIEF: SECRET TAPES, HYDRO ONE IN-SOURCES 400 JOBS, A MARKET RENEWAL RESIGNATION, AND GREEN REBATES

By: David Hains

NDP MPP Gilles Bisson has demanded that Progressive Conservative Leader Patrick Brown release a recording of an under-the-radar conversation between his campaign chair Walied Soliman and a spurned nomination candidate.

"I'm writing to ask you to act with the transparency the people of Ontario deserve from their elected officials and candidates, and stop blocking the release of the complete recording and transcript at issue in the court case involving your party's Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas nomination," Bisson said in a release Wednesday.

He harkened back to the Tories and NDP denouncing in harmony the Liberal reluctance to release tapes related to the Sudbury byelection in 2015.

Whether Brown could release the recording if he wanted to is doubtful, since it was expunged from court records and sealed by an Ontario Superior Court judge following a publication ban last summer.

The conversation occurred on May 24 between Soliman and would-be PC candidate Vikram Singh, who secretly recorded their discussion. Singh is arguing before the court that the recording should be included in his lawsuit against the party over his loss in a controversial nomination meeting last spring.

The party has spent at least \$245,000 in legal fees to stop the conversation from surfacing, according to an August court ruling.

The Liberal party said in a release that Brown and the PC party "continue to dodge questions" around the mysterious recording.

Everyone has heard of outsourcing. But Wednesday morning, Hydro One announced the company would bring 400 customer service jobs in-house, as part of the company's bid to improve customer service. Ontario's largest electricity provider outsourced call centre positions 15 years ago, but the company's existing contract expires Feb. 28, 2018. Markham and London will be the beneficiaries of the unionized jobs.

In a statement, the Society of Energy Professionals, the union that will represent the workers, wrote: "The Society of Energy Professionals is proud to bring critical customer service work back in-house and our members are excited to return to Hydro One. Society members know that customer service is best when it is fully integrated with the rest of the company. We see this as an important step toward providing customers with the quality, professional service they deserve."

In question period on Wednesday, Patrick Brown used his second set of questions to demand why Goreway executive Rob Coulbeck remained on the market renewal panel after his company was the leading culprit in the IESO overcharging scandal. Coulbeck had resigned on Dec. 1 as the co-chair of the market renewal panel, a few days before the Auditor General's report came out. But he stayed on the panel at large.

Glenn Thibeault explained to QP Briefing that Coulbeck wasn't part of the company when the ineligible expenses were filed – those people have been fired – and it's important to have representation from different stakeholders on the panel, and he had confidence in the IESO to ensure appropriate panel representation. But Coulbeck wasn't destined to be on the panel much longer. Despite Thibeault's deferral to IESO's judgment Coulbeck resigned from the panel just a few hours later.

The energy ministry has rolled out a slew of rebates for homeowners to make energy-efficient renovations. The new program, dubbed GreenON Rebates, will cover:

- Up to \$7,200 off new insulation and a \$100 rebate for air sealing;
- Up to \$20,000 to install ground-source heat pumps or up to \$4,500 to repair existing heat pump systems;
- Up to \$5,800 off air source heat pumps;
- Up to \$5,000 for replacement windows.

In addition to the renovation rebates, homeowners and tenants can access a \$100 smart thermostat rebate through a partnership with Save on Energy, the ministry said.

The program will be administered by the Green Ontario Fund, a non-profit provincial agency funded by proceeds from the province's cap-and-trade auctions.