

QP BRIEFING

April 17, 2018

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1). NOBODY'S TALKING ABOUT A COALITION, GRIT SAYS, AS WYNNE STRESSES COMMON GROUND WITH NDP

By: Jessica Smith Cross

Tuned-in provincial politicians might have noticed an interesting habit Premier Kathleen Wynne has recently developed — stressing the common ground her party has with the NDP and complimenting the third party's ideas.

For a political leader heading into what's sure to be a hard-fought election, it's an unusual strategy.

On Monday, the NDP released its platform and Wynne praised it on Tuesday.

"The NDP put forward an interesting platform," said Wynne at a media event. "There's a lot of overlap. There's a lot in that platform that we're either already doing or we are embarking on, and there's some really good ideas. It's interesting, that kind of common ground that is there."

She returned to that theme in question period less than an hour later, telling the house she'd read the NDP platform in the early morning hours.

"I have to say that, as I went through the document, I had my pen, and it was like, okay, we're already doing that," she said. "That's in our plan. Oh, we disagree there. But overall, Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of common ground between what we're putting forward and what the NDP has put forward."

On both occasions, she framed Doug Ford and the Tories as her real political enemy.

"I think it is very, very clear that the real threat to the caring, supportive province that has been built up over decades is coming from Doug Ford, is coming from the Conservatives," she said in question period.

"But the real threat is a threat of cuts, is a threat that holds out a whole different vision of the province where people have to fend for themselves, where there's support for the very wealthy and a cut across government of the services that people need," she said at the media avail. "That's the real threat and that's the really stark choice that people are confronting as we go into this election."

MPP Deb Matthews, the Liberal campaign co-chair, characterized it as Wynne being "honest" about the NDP platform, and found that the priorities of the two parties — child care and investments in hospitals, for example — are not dissimilar.

"She went through it and thought, 'I kind of like the sounds of that, or that's exactly what we're doing, but I'm not too sure about that,'" said Matthews. "But she actually read it thoughtfully and thought, all in all, it's a platform that, at a high level, reflected the same challenges that we've identified in this province."

There is "daylight" between the two parties, Matthews said. One example she gave is on child care: Both parties are proposing to lower day-care costs, but the NDP is only targeting its subsidies toward non-profit day cares.

Matthews said the premier's comments weren't about laying the groundwork for some kind of Liberal-NDP coalition, in the event that the election does not result in a majority government.

"I don't think anybody's talking about a coalition," Matthews said.

Likewise, NDP Leader Andrea Horwath is also not talking about a coalition — but it's not something she's ruling out, saying she'll wait to see what voters decide.

"In fact, I'm very confident that the people of Ontario have already made their decision about Kathleen Wynne," Horwath said. "The Liberals will not be forming government in Ontario. The question now is, who is going to take her place? That is the question Ontarians need to consider. Will it be an Andrea Horwath premier, will it be a Doug Ford premier? It's pretty clear it's not going to be Kathleen Wynne."

In a media scrum Tuesday, Horwath wouldn't weigh-in on what strategic motive Wynne might have for complimenting her platform — if she thought the premier's comments are an attempt to marginalize the NDP, for example.

"It's one of those things where we never know where the premier stands on something," she said. "If it's going to give her a boost in the polls, if it's going to make her have a better opportunity to get elected, that's what she thinks about."

- with files from Christopher Reynolds

2). NEW BILL AIMS TO PROTECT CONSTRUCTION WORKERS' WAGES, HALT LOWBALLING IN PUBLIC CONTRACTS

By: Christopher Reynolds

The government aims to lay an even wage foundation for workers in construction, security and building cleaning, tabling legislation Tuesday to establish minimum pay rates on government contracts.

The bill would require companies bidding on public contracts in those sectors to pay workers according to a "wage schedule" developed by the Ministry of Labour in an attempt to weed out lowball bids that cut costs at the expense of labourers' income and health and safety standards.

The proposed Government Contract Wages Act would be the first update to the province's "fair wage policy" since 1995, according to the premier's office.

"What we're talking about today is levelling the playing field for legitimate contractors to bid on government-funded projects," Premier Kathleen Wynne said Tuesday morning. "It means that if you work on a government project in the construction, building services and building cleaning sectors, you will be paid fairly. Full stop. This is about preventing employers from undercutting workers' wages in order to lowball on provincial projects."

The wage scale would be determined by the "director of government contract wages," a new position established by the bill. The director would consult with industry groups and set wages for each sector based in part on existing collective agreements, with implementation starting in about 18 months if the bill passes, Labour Minister Kevin Flynn said at the United Association of Plumbers and Steamfitters, Local 46 in Scarborough.

"Obviously, we want to get the best value as a government," said Flynn, whose father worked as a steamfitter. "It shouldn't be a race to the bottom based solely on wages."

The Liberals are on a tight timeline, with barely three weeks left to pass the bill on top of signature legislation around correctional reform, pay equity and the budget, among other priorities.

The Grits sought to frame their latest bill as the cherry on top of a layer-cake of legislation on fair labour. Last November, a sweeping reform law ushered in the broadest changes to workplace standards in two decades, putting the minimum wage on track for a hike to \$14 last January and to \$15 as of Jan. 1, 2019, establishing equal pay for equal work regardless of full-time or part-time status, and granting more paid sick days and vacation time.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath offered qualified support for the proposed rule changes.

"We'll certainly have a hard look at it. I can't imagine that if the bill meets our expectations that we would have any problem whatsoever in support of a fair wage policy," she told reporters Tuesday.

"I find it interesting though that at the 11th hour this is what the Liberals are shoving out the door," Horwath added, questioning why the Liberals didn't include the "fair wage policy" in last year's minimum wage bill.

“Again, I suspect it’s politically motivated, as it always is with the Liberals.”

Patrick Dillon, business manager and secretary-treasurer at the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, called Tuesday’s policy update “a big step in the right direction” that will reduce injuries and halt the use of wages “as a tool” to snag contracts.

“When contractors are bidding and one is lowballing the other, they have to cut someplace, and generally they start to cut health and safety,” Dillon said, calling the problem “fairly widespread.”

Enforced by the labour ministry, the policy would apply to contracts with government ministries and certain provincial agencies and Crown corporations, including Metrolinx, Infrastructure Ontario, Ontario Place, and the Liquor Control Board of Ontario.

The law would be applicable to building and cleaning services in government-owned and -occupied buildings as well as four construction sectors: roads, heavy engineering, sewers and water mains, and what’s classified as industrial, commercial and institutional.

The new policy would not cover school boards – including school bus contracts, for example – or other levels of government.

“It’s not our job, I don’t think, to tell elected officials what they should be doing. The people of that community will tell them,” Flynn said.

The City of Toronto has rules around fair wages for municipal contracts in the construction industry.

3). LIBERALS APOLOGIZE FOR TWEET THAT FALSELY STATED DOUG FORD USED OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE

By: David Hains

When PC Leader Doug Ford was the only party leader who declined to participate in a Toronto debate organized by Black community organizers, the Liberals criticized him as being out-of-touch.

In social media copy that was also shared by some Liberal riding accounts, the party stated: "Doug Ford says he 'loves the blacks' but wasn't at the Town Hall tonight... Did Doug Ford deliberately choose to ignore the black community leaders debate? #ONBlackVote #WhereIsDoug #onpoli"

<http://s3-us-east-2.amazonaws.com/qpbriefing/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/17162711/Screen-Shot-2018-04-16-at-3.25.54-PM.png>

There is one problem with this statement: QP Briefing cannot find any record of Doug claiming that he "loves the Blacks," a phrasing that would be considered offensive.

We asked the Liberal Party to provide a reference to where we could find this quotation, and they conceded it was an error.

"It appears the tweet accidentally referred to Doug when it should have said Trump," David Clarke, executive director of the Ontario Liberal Party, said in an e-mail on Monday night. "We've corrected the error and are working to ensure accuracy to re-issue it. This was a mistake and, unlike Ford with his autism comment, we can admit them rather than lying about them."

Simon Jefferies, a spokesman for the PC Party, said that it was about time the Liberals owned up to what he called their record of errors. "For the first time in 15 years, it's finally nice to see this politically corrupt government take accountability for one error. From cancelled gas plants to skyrocketing hydro rates, our focus is on the errors that have negatively impacted the pocketbooks of hard-working Ontarians."

The party deleted the tweet, which was originally published on April 11 and was shared 80 times, after being contacted by QP Briefing on Monday. They did not issue a correction at the time clarifying that they had made an earlier error. They have since issued a new tweet attributing the phrase "loves the Blacks" to Donald Trump, and drawing a parallel to Ford's rhetoric.

"Donald Trump says he 'loves the blacks.' Did Doug Ford deliberately choose to ignore the black community leaders debate? <https://t.co/nSUjPMGj34> #ONBlackVote#WhereIsDoug#onpoli pic.twitter.com/dRPcmYG0Ws

— Ontario Liberal Party (@OntLiberal) April 17, 2018"

The tweet links to the New Pittsburgh Courier Online, citing a 2016 article as a source for the Trump quotation "loves the Blacks." But that article cites Trump saying the phrase "the Blacks," but does not include the word "loves".

The Courier Online appears to be referencing a 2011 Trump radio appearance where the now-U.S. president told Fred Dicker that "I have a great relationship with the Blacks. I've always had a very great relationship with the Blacks."

That's not what the Liberals, who maintain a website called "Facts Still Matter" and are running an ad campaign based on quotes from Ford, quoted.

We followed up with the Liberal Party about Trump's quote too, and Clarke indicated that the party meant to paraphrase the U.S. president's comments, but turned them into a direct quote.

"We made an error in our tweet and should not have used a paraphrase as a quote. We should have done better in this situation," Clarke emailed on Tuesday afternoon. In other words, the original tweet misattributed a quotation that Donald Trump did not directly say to Doug Ford. The second tweet turned paraphrasing into a direct quote. "As you know, we regularly fact check the other parties and we need to hold ourselves to the same standard."

Asked if the Liberals owed the PC leader an apology, Clarke added: "Unlike Mr. Ford, we're more than happy to apologize and take responsibility when we get something wrong."

Andray Domise, director of communications for the Black Business and Professional Association, said that, beyond getting their facts wrong, the Liberal messaging misses out on what's important in confronting Ford on his record.

"There's a way to have a conversation about how, in my opinion, Doug Ford has not been very respectful of the Black communities," said Domise, who did communications for the April 11 debate. "But comparing him to Trump and paraphrasing him, and using his absence at the debate to try to stoke some sort of fear? That's not the approach," added Domise, who unsuccessfully ran against the late Rob Ford for a city council seat in 2014.

"There's a substantive critique to be made of Doug Ford that would include, for example, his views on the anti-racism directorate, his views on carding, his views on the minimum wage, his views on children being taken into the custody of children's aid services at a rate far exceeding our representation in the broader population," he said. "But compressing all those issues into 280 characters or less and making the comparison to Trump while getting the words wrong? It comes off as exploitative."

He added that he was disappointed in the messaging, "especially after the last few years with the Liberal Party engaging the Black community in a very intense and very edifying dialogue."

Domise also explained what makes a phrase like "the Blacks," which has been said by Trump, offensive. "When you say 'the Blacks' what you're doing is lumping us all together in a shapeless monolith," said Domise, who added that it tries to paint people as a "foreign entity" rather than individuals with agency. "We are people just like everyone else."

4). YOUR QUESTION PERIOD BRIEFING: THE 'CHUTZPAH MEDICATION' EDITION

By: Jessica Smith Cross

Before Question Period, MPPs paid tribute to former speaker and PC MPP Chris Stockwell. Stockwell served from 1990 to 2003, and after being passed over for cabinet in 1995, he ran for speaker — against the wishes of then-premier Mike Harris, and won. He beat Doug Ford Sr. for the PC nomination in the redistributed riding of Etobicoke North prior to the 1999 election, and was subsequently named to cabinet. He passed away in February.

Jessica Smith Cross @jessiecatherine

Ontario MPPs are paying tribute to former speaker Chris Stockwell this morning.

Jessica Smith Cross @jessiecatherine

TIL on a few occasions, Speaker @cstockwell_s would make reference to "the clam chowder act," as a little running joke, possibly to see if MPPs were paying attention.

pic.twitter.com/KvJHS3dZBD

11:00 AM - Apr 17, 2018

1 RETWEET 1 LIKE

The most heated moment:

This came when PC health critic Jeff Yurek asked the premier about why a drug that treats cystic fibrosis — Orkambi — isn't available on the Ontario Drug Benefit formulary, and thus not covered for youth under OHIP+. He said the drug program has failed: "Children aren't able to get the medication to help them to breathe. They are losing access to medications they have had for years."

To which Kathleen Wynne replied: "With all due respect, the member opposite must have taken his chutzpah medicine this morning to have the nerve to stand up and to challenge this government on our record on putting in place support for children getting access to medication. It's quite unbelievable."

While a chorus of PCs yelled "arrogance" as she answered, Todd Smith heckled, "I smell toast."

The PCs lead-off:

PC energy critic Todd Smith kicked things off by asking if the premier believes Hydro One CEO Mayo Schmidt's \$6-million salary is appropriate — and Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault responded that a "man down south" is governing by firing, and that isn't working out very well. The PCs are pledging to make sure the Hydro One board fires Schmidt, by threatening to fire the board unless it fires Schmidt.

Smith moved on to ask about the government's accounting of the Fair Hydro Plan, saying the auditor general has said the fact that three private auditing firms — Ernst & Young, Deloitte and KPMG — worked on the plan doesn't equal their approval of the accounting used and its impact on the government books.

Thibeault responded that the government's Fair Hydro Plan was a policy, not a bumper-sticker choice, and said the private-sector accounting firms do indeed stand by the government's accounting.

Best heckle:

"Lot of applause over there for that answer. Fall asleep over there?" -PC MPP John Yakabuski, after one of the energy minister's responses about the accounting of the Fair Hydro Plan got applause from only one solitary Liberal MPP.

NDP lead-off:

Andrea Horwath released her party's platform on Monday, and in her question Tuesday sought to highlight the difference between the NDP plan to offer means-tested child care subsidies and the Liberals' plan to offer free preschool.

Wynne responded, instead, by stressing the similarities between the two party's election promises. The premier said she wanted to tell Horwath that, she did read her platform Tuesday morning and that "there is more common ground between the NDP and than not."

On ethics:

The PCs continued to allege the Liberals are campaigning on the government's dime by holding frequent media events to tout government policy that often turn political. "Stop doing it, it's wrong, and repay the taxpayers," charged PC house leader Jim Wilson. Government house leader (and often the party's human shield on ethical attacks) Yasir Naqvi answered that it's the premier's job to speak about government policies — and because they're so good and the Conservatives will cut them, he understands why Wilson doesn't want her talking about them.

On Health:

NDP MPP France G  linas asked about inadequate funding for northern hospitals.

NDP MPP Teresa Armstrong asked about a lack of urgent mental health care in London, which left a woman on a gurney waiting five days for treatment. Wynne respond with a dig about the NDP proposing to put less money into mental health supports than the Liberals, according to their platform.

On the minimum wage:

Yakabuski said the government's decision to raise the minimum wage is leading to employers laying off people with disabilities, and had been warned about that in committee hearings. "Speaker, the premise of the question, as I understand it, is that, despite the Human Rights Code in this province, the member opposite is prepared to pay somebody who has a challenge, whether that be physical or mental, is prepared to pay them less, is prepared to treat them less," responded Labour Minister Kevin Flynn.

5). *IN BRIEF: APOLOGY TO DiNOVO, GREENS TAKE ON BROADCASTERS, GREEN INITIATIVES, AND PLATFORM BURNS*

By: Christopher Reynolds

The provincial government has apologized to former NDP MPP Cheri DiNovo, who says the Office of the Registrar General warned her it would suspend her licence to perform marriages after she carried out what she claims was the first same-sex wedding in Canada in 2001.

"I am sorry that Reverend DiNovo had to go through the ordeal that she did and that anyone had to go through those difficulties at what should have been one of the happiest moments of their lives," said Government Services Minister Tracy MacCharles in a statement Tuesday.

"It is a sadness that it takes retrospection, and the passage of time, to give due credit to the bravery of the people who helped us to remember that love is love and it comes with no qualifiers."

MacCharles called out the Progressive Conservative administration in power at the time, calling on the party to "take ownership of this dark moment in the history of a once great political party."

"The actions of the previous Ontario Conservative government under Mike Harris and [former cabinet minister] Bob Runciman are regrettable and unfortunate," MacCharles wrote.

In a tweet Tuesday, DiNovo asked PC Leader Doug Ford if he agrees with the apology.

Cheri DiNovo @CheriDiNovo

Mr. Ford hopefully you'll agree with this @fordnation?

<https://twitter.com/TracyMacCharles/status/986266124701450241>

12:02 PM - Apr 17, 2018

6 LIKES SEE CHERI DINOVO'S OTHER TWEETS

Last week, DiNovo, a United Church of Canada minister in Toronto, demanded a personal apology from the government as well as the church, which "did nothing" after the warning from the provincial department, according to her release.

"Currently, the church is gathering stories from its members, including the LGBTQ2S community, that would then help the church to discern if, and how, it might live into an apology to the church's LGBTQ and Two-Spirit people," United Church spokeswoman Catherine Rodd said in a statement to QP Briefing last week. "Rev. DiNovo has been invited to be part of that project."

The release from DiNovo, who signed Canada's first gay liberation manifesto in 1971, said the registrar's response appeared as a "threat."

"It was celebratory ... and then the registrar sent me a letter saying they were going to take away my licence," DiNovo said in an interview with QP Briefing Monday. The church, meanwhile, "just went silent – I was on my own."

"The actions of the Ontario Government under Mike Harris and the United Church of Canada turned what should have been an historic moment of celebration and joy into a time of fear for my livelihood and for my congregation," she said in a statement on April 9.

Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner is fighting for a seat at the televised leaders' debate run by the consortium of broadcasters.

His party launched an online petition to have the debate, set for May 27, include all four publicly funded parties, as recognized by Elections Ontario at MikeAtTheMic.ca.

"Why should something so fundamental to our democracy be left to a handful of media executives with no transparency or accountability to the people of Ontario?" he said in a statement.

"When Greens were rightly invited to the provincial debates in British Columbia, PEI and New Brunswick, they won seats in all those elections. Shutting us out in Ontario does nothing but reinforce status-quo politics and deny voters a chance to hear fresh ideas."

Minister of the Environment and Climate Change Chris Ballard announced Tuesday that Toronto's St. Lawrence Market was one of the successful applicants funded by the Municipal GHG Challenge Fund with proceeds from the province's carbon market. The market will install a renewable geo-exchange system for ground source heating and cooling.

Tory MPP Randy Pettapiece tried to burn his Grit and Dipper opponents on their overlapping agendas. But, given NDP MPP Monique Taylor's reply, he may have ended up walking the platform plank to the detriment of his dignity:

Randy Pettapiece @RandyPettapiece

5:17 PM - Apr 17, 2018

1 LIKE SEE RANDY PETTAPIECE'S OTHER TWEETS

Monique Taylor MPP @MTaylorNDP

Randy are you sad you don't have your own?

https://twitter.com/jm_mcgrath/status/986353374688923648

5:22 PM - Apr 17, 2018

2 LIKES SEE MONIQUE TAYLOR MPP'S OTHER TWEETS

6). *FORD PROMISES SWEEPING LINE-BY-LINE AUDIT, ALLUDES TO JAILING PREMIER*

By: David Hains

PC Leader Doug Ford told a crowd in Brockville on Tuesday that on his first day as premier he will initiate a sweeping audit of every ministry in the government.

"My first day in office as premier we're going to make sure that we have a complete outside audit come in and go line item by line item," he said at Chateau Brock in the eastern Ontario city.

"We will go line item by line item through every single ministry and dig into all the backroom deals for all the political establishment, the political elites and the political Liberal insiders that have been getting hundreds of millions of dollars of contracts."

Ford's pitch of an extensive audit of the province's \$150 billion budget is in part based on assertions that there is lots of waste and questionable practices to be uncovered.

"If Kathleen Wynne tried to pull these kinds of shady tricks in private life, then there would be a few more Liberals joining David Livingstone [sic] in jail," he added in a statement, citing examples of government inefficiencies that have been raised by the auditor general. (He was referring to David Livingston, the former Dalton McGuinty aide who was sentenced to four months in jail for wiping computer records.)

Ford's spokeswoman Melanie Paradis told QP Briefing that there is no cost estimate on the audit yet, but "we'll certainly spend less" on outside consultants.

"There are all kinds of consultants who get contracts that aren't easily identified as such because the only information we have is that which is published in the Public Accounts," she wrote, explaining that coming to a cost estimate is difficult. "This is why the audit we have proposed is required. We will open it up to an open and transparent tender process."

Paradis didn't answer questions on why the auditor general wouldn't be used, or how this audit process would be different from or similar to one that Ford was part of in 2011.

The strategy to start a new administration with an audit echoes what was done at Toronto city hall when the Ford brothers were elected in 2010 in large part on a promise to "stop the gravy train." Once elected, mayor Rob Ford and Doug as city councillor, backed the hiring of consulting firm KPMG, which led an extensive core service review. KPMG found that there was not much "gravy," and that 90 per cent of city services were legally required. The remaining 10 per cent included options such as closing a number of libraries, reducing transit service and removing flouride from the water supply to save costs.

The audit process sparked an unprecedented pushback from Toronto citizens; hundreds who were concerned about service cuts – despite an election promise of "no service cuts, guaranteed" – were part of an all-nighter to almost unanimously speak against proposed cuts. One 14-year-old girl, Anika Tabovaradan, gave a tearful deputation to city hall's executive committee at 2:15 a.m. about what keeping her public library open for after-school hours meant for her ability to get homework done. Other candidates for cuts included eliminating the student nutrition fund, hardship fund, and Christmas bureau, and shutting down community petting zoos.

In a dramatic 23–21 vote, council rejected the proposed budget preferred by the Fords, restoring city funding for some at-risk city services.

Ultimately, a 2015 review from Toronto's auditor general found that the KPMG core services review only delivered \$16 million in efficiencies, around \$100 million less than initially claimed.

The premier's office also cited the city's audit in a statement.

"We've seen this show before and we know exactly what Doug Ford does to try to cover up the cuts he wants to make," said spokeswoman Andrea Ernesaks. "The last time Doug Ford brought in an outside auditor it was during his time at the city of Toronto – where he paid millions of dollars to external consultants to try and find services to cut, and public sector workers to lay off.

"He also tried to cut transit funding, policing and firefighting and he even wanted to close down the cities zoos. He even suggested reducing snow removal, environmental programs and social supports. He spent millions of dollars on that outside auditor and then his team overstated the potential savings by almost \$100 million," said Ernesaks. "Doug Ford refuses to provide a costed platform, and he won't tell Ontarians what his plans are or where the cuts will be made. Now we know that he's going to hire a firm to find 4% in across the board cuts."

On Tuesday in Brockville, Ford reiterated that his success in Toronto will translate to more savings at the province, claiming that he saved \$1 billion at city hall. This claim has been widely debunked, including by the Toronto Star, Globe and Mail, Metro, and the Grid. Top Toronto civil servants also deemed the claim to be "misleading."

It wouldn't be the first time that an incoming premier began an administration with an audit. Upon taking office in 2003, Dalton McGuinty's government hired former provincial auditor general Erik Peters to review the books, which found the Grits inherited a surprising deficit from the PCs. That ultimately inspired the Liberal government to pass a law requiring the auditor general to take a look and the province's books and weigh-in prior to each election.

The auditor's pre-election finance report is expected to be released shortly.