

QP Briefing: April 10, 2018

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Q P B R I E F I N G

April 10, 2018

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Click links below to view article:

Articles

- [1\). Wynne weighs in on turfed Tory MPP Michael Harris](#)
- [2\). Your Question Period briefing: The trumped-up edition](#)
- [3\). Pay transparency law 'disappointing,' 'trailing' behind feds, critics say](#)
- [4\). Environmental watchdog says government isn't heeding its own climate law](#)
- [5\). Ontario Medical Association reaches interim agreement with province on 'relativity'](#)
- [6\). In brief: Ontario Plowed, a SmartTrack deal, and vulnerable road users](#)

Articles

1). Wynne weighs in on turfed Tory MPP Michael Harris

By: Christopher Reynolds

In the wake of MPP Michael Harris's excommunication from the Progressive Conservative caucus Monday over what he called "inappropriate texting" with a former intern, Premier Kathleen Wynne decried sexual harassment as a "systemic" scourge — but said no one party or group comes off completely clean.

"The sexual harassment, sexual assault are never okay, it doesn't matter where," Wynne said. "But we have to understand that they are systemic."

"If we try to say that one group of people is better than another group of people, I think we get ourselves into real trouble," she said, when asked about differences between political parties.

Wynne hinted at "situations" the provincial Liberal party has had to "deal with."

In 2016, news surfaced that a woman had accused former Liberal lawmaker Kim Craiton of sexual harassment, allegations the premier said prompted her to force his resignation three

years earlier and which he deemed "unfounded and unsubstantiated."

Wynne has identified Craitor as one of two Liberal MPPs accused of sexual harassment during her tenure.

"We have a process in place and at the heart of that process is always the wishes of the woman, the person who has come forward," the premier told reporters Tuesday.

She stressed a clear, widely understood process as one key to cutting down harassment and confronting it when it arises.

"I want to know that everyone who is working in this province, male or female — but you know the reality is that most of these situations involve women ... knows that if they are the recipient of this kind of behaviour or if they have been in a situation where they have felt compromised, whether through sexual assault or sexual violence, then they come forward and that they feel safe to come forward ... They have to be taken seriously."

Harris, who served as the MPP for Kitchener—Conestoga since 2011 but whose house seat is now nestled in an island of PC castaways — Patrick Brown and Jack MacLaren comprise the rest — announced last Saturday he would not seek re-election, citing optical health issues.

The party opted to boot him from caucus at noon only after the Toronto Star pressed the Tories Monday morning about Harris having been apparently red-lighted — at that point undisclosed — by the nominations committee over harassment allegations from a woman formerly employed at Queen's Park.

PC Leader Doug Ford weighed in with a tweet at about 4 p.m. Monday, saying Harris was turfed at "the first opportunity."

Doug Ford @fordnation

Please see my statement below.

<https://pbs.twimg.com/media/DaXaPfUwAELZte.jpg>

3:50 PM - Apr 9, 2018

172 LIKES 108 PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT THIS

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath said Tuesday the public needs to hear more from the top Tory, who was elected to the post precisely one month earlier.

"I think Mr. Ford needs to explain to the people of Ontario when he knew what this was all about, and why he allowed Mr. Harris and perhaps others to attempt to cover it up.

"I think a pattern of behaviour is something that we need to take seriously, and that's what we're seeing from the Conservatives," Horwath said.

Wynne said she reached out to Harris shortly after his initial statement Saturday.

"I saw the statement that came out about Michael Harris's health condition, the young man with a family, and I said to my staff I'd like to give them a call because I had no idea he was struggling with that health condition," Wynne said. "When I called him that's all we talked about and I wished him well."

[Top](#)

2). Your Question Period briefing: The trumped-up edition

By: David Hains

The Main Issue:

PC budget wonk Vic Fedeli (of "Fideli on Finance" fame) used the lead question of the day to raise concerns that credit ratings agencies have had with the government's proposed deficit spending.

"We are getting a raw deal because this government can't control its spending," Fedeli said.

He went on to say that Quebec's fiscal policy has surpassed Ontario's, and the proof is in the appetite for bonds from the respective provinces.

Finance Minister Charles Sousa rejected Fedeli's line of questioning, citing various financial metrics to speak to the strength of Ontario's economy. "We have more liquidity in our bonds and it trades well," Sousa said. He added that he didn't think the comparison to Quebec was reasonable, and that Ontario carries its weight. "Furthermore, Quebec receives \$11 billion from the federation. Ontario is a net contributor to the federation, always has been, even when we qualified for equalization, to the tune of \$11 billion. We support all of Canada. We're the engine of Canada and they are talking down the province."

Fedeli then tried another line of financial questioning, asking the government why corporate taxes aren't lower, citing the United States as an example.

"Almost a year ago, on May 5, 2017, a Canadian Press headline read, 'Ontario prepared to lower corporate taxes ... in response to the U.S.' It's been almost a year. Will the government lower taxes to help grow and attract businesses?" he asked.

While Sousa touts the small business tax cut issued by the government that coincided with an increase to the minimum wage, it's worth noting that the U.S. tax cuts dramatically increased the debt and deficit, which the PCs are also arguing against.

Other Issues:

Catherine Fife retabled a vulnerable road users' law and questioned the government on its commitment to ensuring that drivers are held accountable. "Why is it acceptable in Ontario that a driver who seriously injures a vulnerable road user — a pedestrian or a cyclist — like Anthony, only receives a \$125 fine?" she asked, referring to Anthony Smith, who was hit by a driver while riding his bike in Barrie.

The Liberals responded that they've already addressed this with legislation that was passed in December, although the policies haven't been implemented yet.

Jeff Yurek and Norm Miller asked about health care funding in their ridings.

Cindy Forster asked about the strike by York University contract faculty that has 3,000 workers on the picket lines, and criticized the government for not doing enough to fund universities. For the government, Mitzie Hunter said both sides will need to make compromises

Quote of the day: "We know, with a trumped-up question like the one that just came from the acting Leader of the Opposition, that they actually seem to specialize in talking down our province," said Steven Del Duca in response to Fedeli asking about cutting taxes as U.S. politicians have. The use of "trumped-up" was almost certainly intentional, although it doesn't get capitalization from Hansard.

Heckle of the Day: "Cap-and-tax!" shouted a PC MPP as Shafiq Qaadri asked the minister of the environment about cap-and-trade, using the euphemism "cap-and-invest."

Birthdays: A very happy birthday to Sophie Kiwala. May her cake be delicious.

Turning the page: The new pages were introduced today! This batch looks taller than the last one.

Speaker's warnings: Sylvia Jones, Sam Oosterhoff, Marie-France Lalonde, Andrea Horwath, David Zimmer, Todd Smith, John Yakabuski, Randy Hillier

[Top](#)

3). *Pay transparency law 'disappointing,' 'trailing' behind feds*

By: Christopher Reynolds

Ontario's minister of the status of women has defended pay transparency legislation as

leading the pack of Canadian provinces, but pay equity advocates argue it pales in comparison with other countries.

Ontario is the first province to try to implement a pay transparency law, Harinder Malhi said Tuesday, which was Pay Equity Day in Ontario.

"We want to get it right, and that's why we followed what the other jurisdictions are doing," she said. "We want to be able to give women an equal opportunity to be able to bargain, to be able to know what their full value," she said.

"Just recently there's been a show on Netflix called The Crown, and we all know about the queen and the prince: even though the queen is the leading role, the prince is making almost three times what she is making," Malhi said, referring to actors Claire Foy and Matt Smith. "Had it been publicly disclosed, she would never have accepted that position at that wage."

The Pay Transparency Act, now in second reading at Queen's Park, requires employers to prepare a report detailing the "differences in compensation in the employer's workforce with respect to gender." The legislation also requires a salary rate for job postings and bars reprisals against workers who disclose compensation.

The rules will be phased in, applying first to public sector employees, then to private companies with more than 500 employees in 2019, then to workplaces with more than 250 employees in 2020 or 2021, the government has said. The specific numbers are set for inclusion in the regulations, but are not part of the legislation now before the House.

"There's absolutely no principled reason to have the legislation apply only to large employers," said Fay Faraday, a Toronto-based labour rights lawyer and co-chair of the Ontario Equal Pay Coalition.

About 98 per cent of employers in Ontario have fewer than 50 employees, she said, highlighting the relatively small slice of the population that would be covered by the Pay Transparency Act. In 2011, more than half of respondents to a survey from the provincial Pay Equity Office appeared to have a gender wage gap.

The province has seen past attempts to balance the pay scales — among other injustices — such as the Ontario Human Rights Code in 1962, which prohibited gender discrimination in all aspects of employment, as well as the Employment Standards Act in 1968 and the Pay Equity Act in 1987. Too often, Faraday said, employers have been flouting the law.

"If you set a threshold for compliance with only the largest employers being held accountable, what you're actually doing is undermining those other pieces of fundamental workplace legislation that make discrimination illegal," she said.

Malhi pointed to parallel legislation in Britain and Australia as grounds for the Pay Transparency Act. But Faraday called Britain "the weakest model" out there, with Australia not far behind.

Pay transparency rules in Britain apply to workplaces of 250 or more, and Australia's cover those of 100 or more. Iceland is more cutting edge with companies of 25 or more required as of this year to show they pay male and female employees fairly. Other companies in Europe have comparable laws applicable to workplaces as small as 35 or 50 employees, Faraday said.

Last month, the federal budget set out \$50 million to introduce pay transparency over three years in federal jurisdictions for employers with 10 or more employees, among other measures.

"They're actually coming with the lowest level of protection on the global scene, and they're going to be trailing significantly behind the federal government," Faraday said of the Ontario Liberals.

"This isn't something that's complicated. Employers already have all this data in their payroll system. They know what occupation every employee works in. They know whether they're full-time, whether they're part-time ... They know what sex they are. They know what they're being

paid," she said. "All you have to do is run spreadsheets."

Premier Kathleen Wynne acknowledged that more than three decades after Liberal premier David Peterson's pay equity legislation, "women have gained just 10 cents on the dollar towards closing that gap — for women of color or Indigenous women, that gap is even bigger."

"Today is April 10th and it's about 30 per cent into this year. And because women are still paid around 30 percent less than men, then women have essentially been working free since January 1st," Wynne said at St. Helen Catholic School in Toronto on Tuesday. "That's what we're dealing with."

She highlighted free day care for children between age two and a half and kindergarten as one example of impending relief for women.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath said women's advocates are "disappointed" with the legislation for both pay transparency and free daycare.

"It's a half-measure and it doesn't deal with all women workers," she said. "Even their child-care legislation, or their child-care investment, is a half-measure. It only deals with some women and some families; infants and toddlers are completely left of the list when it comes to affordable child care. It's very disappointing."

Horwath said the NDP would "walk the walk" to achieve gender equity and a broader child-care plan.

[Top](#)

4). Environmental watchdog says government isn't heeding its

By: David Hains

Ontario's environmental watchdog has called out the Long-Term Energy Plan in her annual progress report, stating that the government "ignores its own climate law."

"The Ministry [of Energy] is making no plans to comply," Dianne Saxe warned in a press conference. She observed that the energy ministry and Ministry of Environment and Climate Change are not co-operating on objectives, in part to being too siloed from one another.

"It's simply not possible for the government to achieve its goals when two branches are not working together. They're going in opposite directions."

"We've been working with the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change," responded Energy Minister Glenn Thibeault in remarks to QP Briefing. "Obviously, she says there's more work to do on that and we'll take those recommendations forward."

The consequences of unaligned policies are significant, Saxe said

"From an economic perspective, it means the province has turned its back on the renewable energy industry," she said, adding that the lack of an aligned policy between environment and energy means "the province has not got a path forward" to achieve greenhouse gas goals, even with optimal conservation efforts.

According to the climate law, Ontarians "must be prepared to reduce emissions from fossil fuel use by 40 to 50 per cent in the next 13 years," states the report prepared by Saxe.

She also used the opportunity to dispel "myths, rumours and part-truths" that cloud the environmental policy file.

"Contrary to popular belief, the sale of Hydro One has not added anything to power bills," she said, adding that, because of the Fair Hydro Plan, bills are artificially cheap right now by about 20 per cent.

"And selling surplus power when we don't need it generated net revenue of about a quarter of a billion dollars in 2016, which Ontario's electricity consumers would otherwise have had to

pay," she said, taking issue with a line of argument used sometimes by the PCs and energy interest groups.

She also warned that "rate increases are ahead," in part to help finance the refurbishment of the Bruce and Darlington nuclear reactors, and to pay back the interest on the Fair Hydro Plan. "We know electricity rates are going up, they have to go up," she said.

Saxe also argued that conservation efforts still have room for improvement at times of peak demand. Asked by QP Briefing whether that meant the government should act urgently to invest in conservation efforts while energy prices are still low, she said: "Absolutely."

One area that Saxe would like to see greater government investment in is conservation programs for the 16 per cent of homes that rely on electric heating, many of which are in rural Ontario and face harsh winters. She added that 7 per cent of Ontarians live in "energy poverty," a financial measure where more than 10 per cent of household income is spent on utility bills.

Asked about the commissioner's recommendation, Environment Minister Chris Ballard touted the government's GreenON energy program, which is funded by proceeds from the cap-and-trade auctions. The funds can be used on items like the energy efficient home retrofits.

Despite her criticism of the Long-Term Energy Plan, the environmental commissioner had a number of positive findings in her report. She commended the government on ending coal-fired power and replacing it with renewable energy sources. She said "the cost to clean up the system led to higher electricity bills, but overall, it was worth it," adding that cheaper power in 2005 came with environmental and health costs. She also pointed out that Ontario has sufficient power to meet demand, although this surplus will decline in the coming years.

[Top](#)

5). Ontario Medical Association reaches interim agreement wit

By: Jessica Smith Cross

The Ontario Medical Association has come to an agreement with the provincial government on the thorny issue of the relative levels of compensation between specialities — and it's come as a big surprise to doctors who believed their association would deal with that in arbitration next month.

Ontario's doctors have been without a contract for five years, and had agreed to a binding arbitration process with the government on physician compensation with the first dates in late May.

However, the OMA sent an email to members Tuesday morning announcing an interim relativity agreement.

"Relativity" refers to the difference in compensation between different medical specialities, with some specialties such as paediatrics and psychiatry generally seen as underpaid compared to others such as cardiology and radiology.

The agreement sets out how the parties will determine the first and second years of the agreement that will be reached through arbitration, as well as a process to determine the relativity model thereafter.

According to the head of the independent physician group Concerned Ontario Doctors, physicians were blindsided by the agreement and were informed it had been reached under a confidentiality deal.

"This has many doctors worried, many doctors don't trust the OMA," said the group's leader Dr. Kulvinder Gill.

Gill told QP Briefing that doctors had fought hard for arbitration — including by protesting in the streets — and negotiating outside of that framework doesn't honour the process.

Neither the OMA nor the Ministry of Health would comment on the issue by deadline Tuesday.

[Top](#)

6). In brief: Ontario Plowed, a SmartTrack deal, and vulnerabl

By: Jessica Smith Cross

There's a new player in the Ontario election meme wars, and it's pretty corny.

"Ontario Plowed" is a parody of the popular anti-Liberal meme factory, Ontario Proud, that appears to come from a pro-NDP, pro-rural perspective.

It includes such gems as a meme of NDP MPP John Vanthof that exhorts social media users to "Like if you think we need more farmers like John Yanking the udders at Queen's Park."

Another is a fake poll on which party leader Ontarians would most like to help them "reap a bountiful harvest." The answer, by a strong majority, is "sturdy and good humoured" Andrea Horwath, over "corn thief" Kathleen Wynne and "fears horses" Doug Ford.

Ontario Plowed

1 hr ·

It's just common sense!

(Like Ontario Plowed for more farm-fresh content like this.)

[Facebook Photo Image](#)

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Toronto and Metrolinx are nearing a deal that would see the provincial agency assume operations and maintenance for GO/RER and SmartTrack stations in the city. A City of Toronto staff report showed the new terms and conditions for funding Mayor John Tory's signature campaign promise, and that includes some alterations from the November 2016 agreement struck between the city and the province.

That deal would have seen Toronto pay for maintenance and operations for the additional SmartTrack stations added to the previously planned GO/RER expansion. But the staff report says that parsing costs between Metrolinx and the city would prove confusing, and the provincial agency is also better positioned to achieve economies of scale in taking on the city's SmartTrack stations. The deal isn't quite done, but there could be an announcement in the next week.

"We're closing in on that," said Transportation Minister Kathryn McGarry in remarks to QP Briefing. "Stay tuned, I would think in the next few days we'll hopefully be providing more clarity on that," she added.

In exchange for taking on the additional operating and maintenance costs, Metrolinx could assume ownership of some city land where the new stations will be located.

NDP MPP Catherine Fife tabled a private member's bill Tuesday to strengthen legislation protecting "vulnerable road users."

By amending the Highway Traffic Act, the Vulnerable Road Users law aims to shift the legal consequences of a collision that seriously injures or kills someone.

"Each year, thousands of people are seriously injured or killed while using our roads," Fife said.

She pointed to Barrie cyclist Anthony Smith, whose spine was fractured after he became trapped under a pickup truck that Fife said swerved across his path. The driver was only charged for hiding his plate and received a \$125 fine, according to an NDP release.

Under the bill, a driver who causes injury or death would be guilty of an offence if they caused it by breaking a rule such as drunk driving, driving while using a cell phone, speeding or improperly sharing the road.

Anyone convicted would be subject to "existing consequences" as well as a mandatory probation order, the release stated. The order would require the driver to take a driving instruction course and perform community service related to road safety, among other possible legal ramifications.

[Top](#)