

February 2020

## ONTARIO BY ELECTIONS

---

Two by elections, one in Ottawa-Vanier and the other in Orleans, are scheduled for Thursday, February 27th.

Both ridings, currently vacant, are considered Liberal strongholds and were previously represented by Nathalie Des Rosier (now Principal at Massey College) and Marie-France Lalonde (now the MP for Orleans).

Here's the candidate rundown:

### Orleans

- Greens - Andrew West, a lawyer and GPO Attorney General critic
- Liberals – Stephen Blais, an Ottawa city Councillor
- NDP - Manon Parrot
- None of the Above Direct Democracy Party – Keegan Bennett, a perennial candidate
- PCs - Natalie Montgomery, a PhD candidate, a health advocate, wife of failed 2018 PC candidate and recently appointed ECAO Chair Cameron Montgomery

### Ottawa-Vanier

- Greens – Benjamin Koczwarski, an engineer
- Liberals – Lucille Collard, a French school board trustee
- NDP – Myriam Djilane, a community activist
- None of the Above Direct Democracy Party – Above Znoneofthe, a perennial candidate who changed his name to get bottom of the candidate list placement on the ballot
- PC - Patrick Mayangi, a political staffer in the office of an Edmonton MP

By elections are often referendums on the incumbent government, so that factor offers little hope of victory for the governing Tories, whose popularity remains low even after last summer's reset. The Tories don't seem to be able to escape from the wake of their disastrous first year in power.

Polls continue to show majority public support for the teachers in their labour negotiations with the province and this could also factor into voter intentions in the Ottawa area ridings.

Licence plate-gate also didn't garner increased confidence in the ruling PCs. It was a needless change, inspired only by vanity, that was badly fumbled.

The weather could be a factor too. The winter storm, expected to drop significant snowfall over the nation's capital, will produce a low turnout, possibly favouring the Grits.

If both ridings switched from Liberal to Conservative, there would be no change in the power structure at Queen's Park. The two by elections are essentially meaningless in terms of the balance of power at the Pink Palace. Knowing this, voters will lack inspiration to turn out.

So, with all of these factors carefully considered, I'm going to go out on a limb and predict two Liberal victories.

## POLLS REVEAL PUBLIC SENTIMENT IN TEACHERS' JOB ACTION

Most will know that in the current labour dispute between the teachers' unions and the provincial government, the teachers are looking for a cost of living increase of around 2% and the government wants to cap salary increases at 1%. The government also wants to increase class sizes and introduce e-learning requirements.

A recent poll conducted by DART regarding public sentiment relating to current labour actions by teachers' unions in Ontario reflected the following

- the government is losing ground on the public relations front in the battle with teachers' unions.
- 63% of respondents said they believe the bargaining impasse is about the government's move to increase class sizes and introduce mandatory e-learning,
- 46% of respondents blame the government or the current state of affairs
- 58% believe the PCs should move swiftly with back-to-work legislation should teachers ramp up to a full-blown strike.
- Support for the claim that unions are treating students like "pawns" has weakened to 48% while 52% disagree

DART's poll is considered accurate within 4.6% 19 times out of 20.

Another poll conducted by Campaign Research for the Toronto Star revealed the following:

- 44% of respondents believe current teacher salaries (average \$93,000) are about right while 38% think they are too high
- 35% of respondents supported the teachers' salary demands while 45% supported the government's 1% cap
- 35% of respondents support a 1% - 2% salary increase per year for three years while 32% support a 0% - 1% increase
- 52% of respondents supported the teachers position on e-learning while 28% supported the government
- 52% supported the teachers' position on class size while 36% supported the government
- 52% strongly agree or somewhat agree with the teachers' one-day rotating job action while 42% strongly disagree or somewhat disagree
- 44% believe the teachers should be legislated back to work while 38% said no
- 73% strongly support or somewhat support all-day kindergarten

The full report can be found by clicking on <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zvYQcS-CQ1Apxl0ngPhFcYtYGDK8EI8c/view>

The Campaign Research poll is considered accurate +/- 2.5% 19

## GOVERNMENT RELATIONS SUMMARY

For this section of the February GR Report, I'm going to crib from the recently drafted reports that are contained in the pre-meeting information package for the upcoming Board of Directors meeting scheduled for March 3rd following our Annual General Meeting. That meeting will be a very brief one, called mainly for the purpose of electing the 2020-21 Officers and Executive Committee members and will have a consent agenda only.

### WSIB

Jennifer Anderson, formerly the Chief Service Excellence Officer, was confirmed as the WSIB's new Chief Operating Officer; the service excellence cluster will continue to report into Jennifer's office.

The Director of the Office of the Employer Advisor, Michael Zacks, will be retiring at the end of March 2020. Representations have been made to senior level officials in government regarding the appointment of Michael's successor.

The term of office of WSIB Chair, Elizabeth Witmer, terminates in May 2020. It is not known if Mrs. Witmer is seeking an extension. COCA has expressed support for Mrs. Witmer's leadership and the need to have a competent person leading the WSIB's Board of Directors, to senior officials in government.

The term of office of WSIB President & CEO, Tom Teahen, terminates in January 2021. It is not known whether Mr. Teahen is seeking an extension. COCA has supported his leadership capabilities and achievements many times to senior officials in government.

Significant financial incentives will be available to employers that voluntarily choose to participate in WSIB's new health and Safety Excellence Program (HSEP). Employers who complete the program should be in a position to apply for the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development's Accreditation and Recognition program which offers even further financial incentives. Employers who complete the HSEP should also be in a position to seek the Certificate of Recognition (CoR) 2020.

Employer associations have received very few enquiries or complaints regarding the WSIB's new classification

framework, the new rate setting process and the new experience rating program that make up the rate framework.

We continue to wait for the WSIB operational report and the report on occupational cancers to be made public.

### Occupational Health and Safety

The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development finally launched the initiative that has to this point been called "Accreditation" under the name "Supporting Ontario's Safe Employers" (SOSE) which includes the accreditation of various health and safety management systems including CoR 2020 (recently updated to meet the accreditation standard) and the recognition of employers that effectively use these accredited systems. Employers that qualify will receive financial incentives for a period of three years.

The Prevention Council has been repopulated with eight of its 14 members from the construction industry.

Jody Young is the new Assistant Deputy Minister of Operations succeeding Peter Agruso who retired after a long career in the Ministry.

At time of writing, Ontario's second Provincial Health and Safety Strategy is in its final stages of approval. This overarching strategy will be a further attempt to bring focus and coordination to the province's health and safety system which includes 217 private sector training providers that have been approved by the Chief Prevention Officer, the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development's Policy Branch and Prevention Office, the Safe Workplace Associations (IHSA), the Workers' Health and Safety Centre, the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) and the WSIB's HSEP and Return to Work program.

In her report to the Legislature in December, the Auditor General noted that Ontario is a very safe place in which to work relative to other jurisdictions but she questioned the value of the money invested in the province's health and safety system and the functionality of the "system". She made a number of recommendations to which the Ministry of Labour Training and Skills Development

has already responded. We suspect the delay in the publication of the Provincial Health and Safety Strategy may have been as a result of the Auditor General's report and recommendations. Her recommendations could feature significantly in the provincial strategy.

The Working at Heights (WAH) training program and the Joint Health and Safety Committee Part 2 training program are currently under review. JHSC Part 1 training program has been reviewed and it's expected that the new training standard will be posted soon.

#### **Apprenticeship Committee Report**

The Ontario College of Trades continues to operate and perform all the necessary functions of the oversight body for the province's skilled trades and apprenticeship system. Most of the main criticisms of the College, criticisms that date back to its origins in April 2012, have been addressed. Fees have been cut in half and eliminated for Apprentices. Enforcement has been stopped and replaced with compliance visits. The governance model has been streamlined. But very gradually the College is being wound down and some responsibilities have been moved over to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

It appears that the new Minister responsible for the province's skilled trades and apprenticeship system, Monte McNaughton, appears to have hit the "off" button on the previously announced Pariser-Melnyk review.

In December, Minister McNaughton announced a government advertising campaign designed to attract more young people into careers in the skilled trades and he followed it up with a tour around Ontario dribbling out small amounts of funding here and there for various skills training programs.

As far as we know, very little has been done at the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development to restructure the skilled trades and apprenticeship system. We noted our disappointment with the lack of activity on this file in our pre-budget submission to the government. We believe that this restructuring will be presented in the provincial budget expected sometime in March.

We have been told by informed sources that it's unlikely that the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills

Development will move ahead with portable skill sets and restricted activities for the construction trades. However, several organizations that are supporters of the current government continue to press for the implementation of portable skill sets and restricted activities.

Pursuant to December's COO meeting, Ian Cunningham followed up with Agnes Watkinson of NextGen Professionals. Agnes is an extremely energetic person with a "can do" approach but could be casting her net too widely for her small, new organization. I am not certain what formal partnership we might strike between COCA and NextGen Professionals, but we should certainly keep in regular contact and support one another when it serves or mutual interests

The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development was recently given the responsibility for the immigration nominee program. We believe this change was made to allow the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development to work with federal authorities to attract more in-demand skilled trades people to Ontario as a more immediate solution to the skilled trades shortage.

#### **Construction Act**

Ted Dreyer has been drafting a growing list of "bugs" and proposed solutions for them, in the still relatively new Construction Act. The solutions that Ted proposes do not change the delicate balance between/among parties to a construction project that exists under the Act. Once the list has been finalized and approved at the COCA level, support for it will be sought outside COCA including the Ontario Bar Association's Construction Law Section and the OGCA before lobbying the Ministry of the Attorney General.