

INSIDE QUEEN'S PARK

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GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

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TWO MORE BY-ELECTIONS KEY FOR ALL THREE PARTIES

Graham Murray

I spent the day before the Niagara Falls and Thornhill by-elections were announced with a bunch of stakeholders who had been invited to the Elections Ontario HQ in Scarborough to offer suggestions on the organization's 'Next Generation' Website.

After we served up our demands, together with some blunt criticisms, Ontario elections chief **Greg Essensa** walked us out across the vast loading floor and along the rows of industrial shelving groaning with plastic-wrapped skids full of voters' lists, blank ballots, instruction manuals and everything else needed by returning officers to unpack an 'election in a box'.

And primed to pick them up when "the writ drops" is a logistics fleet with more than 60 semi-trailers. Your brush with the pending "election-event" (as they term it in electro-speak) may be fleeting but Essensa, his permanent staff and the thousands recruited to conduct the vote in 107 ridings, are in for a month of late hours. (Back in the day, a provincial election could last for as long as 45 days but the *Election Act* now requires it be squeezed into a standard 29 days.)

Only a couple of those semi-trailers would have pulled out of EO's Rolark Drive launch-pad 24 hours after our Jan. 17 visit because Premier Wynne had formally initiated a pair of by-elections, in Niagara Falls and Thornhill, leaving the electoral machinery ticking over to await the spring general election which most observers expect to see unleashed a few months hence.

Wynne has worked ferociously hard since calling the by-elections – as she has been doing in field after field since winning the Liberal leadership last Jan. 26 and being sworn in as Ontario premier last Feb. 11. One problem she has faced is the assertion she lacks a personal mandate, other than that conferred by a couple of thousand Liberal delegates in the convention at Make Believe Gardens. That line of attack has been augmented by demands for a sharper break with the policies followed by her much un-loved and far less respected predecessor.

A related challenge has been to find the energy and time to array her own policy objectives in her party's own shop window, which requires her to stop paying so much attention to opposition party initiatives and proposals advanced by stakeholders far and wide. Wynne actually is open to addressing many such matters, though she would be advised to respond to fewer of the conversations others initiate and pose some more questions for her opponents to answer.

Wynne is certainly not relying just on conversational charm. A new hospital is the electoral goodie for Niagara, and Thornhill voters are being reminded bluntly that it was the Liberals who promised a subway connection to Vaughan and cautioned that the other parties can't be relied upon to complete it. Not quite the new way of doing politics we heard so much about a year ago.

THORNHILL – The LIB candidate in Thornhill is **Sandra Yeung Racco**, spouse of **Mario Racco**, who had defeated former Tory cabinet minister **Tina Molinari** in 2003. Racco was, in turn, defeated in 2007 by PC **Peter Shurman**, a broadcaster who held the seat in the face of a strong challenge by **Bernie Farber**, a leading figure in the Canadian Jewish community. Sandra Racco was nominated to run shortly after the 2011 election in which Farber failed to win back Shurman's seat. The PCs have nominated optometrist **Gila Martow**, and the NDP candidate is **Cindy Hackelberg**, a TV reporter who was their 2011 candidate after a nasty left-right scuffle which made her the very last major-party nominee in the last provincial contest. The Greens ran **Stephanie Duncan** here in 2011 but their by-election candidate is **Dr. Teresa Pun**.

The Liberals are keen to take back what was the only PC seat in the GTA until **Doug Holyday** took Etobicoke-Lakeshore in August. Thornhill has been a markedly marginal seat over the last five by-elections. Molinari held it in 1999 by only 0.8%; Racco took it in 2003 by 1.7%; Shurman gained it in 2007 with 3.2%; and he retained it again in 2011 by 5.8% -- hardly what one would call a safe seat but measured against the four previous results it was a comfortable result. Shurman's resignation after he was disciplined by PC leader **Tim Hudak** over use of the Leg. housing allowance to buy his new home in, ironically, the Niagara Falls riding, will likely eat into the 2011 edge. But Prime Minister **Stephen Harper**'s current visit to Israel can be expected to have an opposite spill-over effect in the provincial by-election in this heavily Jewish riding. The NDP has throughout those five elections been held below 10%, and in 2007 it was only 0.7% away from being pushed into 4th-place by the Greens.

NIAGARA FALLS – The LIBs, PCs and NDP have all nominated municipal pols to run in Niagara Falls. The LIBs are running city councilor **Joyce Morocco**; the PCs have nominated Harris era-MPP and current regional councilor **Bart Maves**; and the NDP has picked local councilor **Wayne Gates**. The NDP had high hopes for a 2011 breakthrough with a star municipal politician, past Fort Erie mayor **Wayne Redekop**, but he did no better than run third. The Greens are running businessman **Clarke Bitter**.

Bart Maves won the Niagara Falls riding for the PCs by 3.5 per cent in 1999. It was taken in 2003 for the LIBs by city councilor **Kim Craitor** with an 8.8 per cent edge. He held the seat in 2007 by almost double that margin: 16.4 per cent but held it again in 2011 by a fractional margin – 1.1 per cent. Craitor was not promoted beyond the rank of PA and could not be trusted to hew to the party line. His resignation last September was not helpfully timed. In 1999 through 2007, the NDP was at or close to 10 per cent but Redekop's 2011 vote of 26.3 per cent put the party in contention. There is NDP buzz in the by-election but that could reflect the party's good performance in such contests since 2011 rather than conditions on the ground.

One welcome by-election development is the nomination of more women by the LIBs, who ran only one in the clutch of five August 2013 by-elections.

PHARMACISTS CONTINUE TO PUSH FOR BIGGER ROLE IN HEALTH CARE

Staff

Ontario pharmacists have been pushing for a bigger role in health care and say they can help millions of Canadians with high blood pressure get healthier while saving public health-care dollars.

Ontario Pharmacists Association says pharmacist-led hypertension management program can save money and produce healthier and more productive workers.

A study released Monday by the Ontario Pharmacists Association and Green Shield Canada shows that a pharmacist-led hypertension management program paid for by private medical plans would save money and produce healthier and more productive employees.

Both the druggists' group and Green Shield Canada – a major drug and dental benefits manager – want more companies to adopt similar initiatives in their benefit programs.

Launched in late 2011, the study looked at 118 uncontrolled hypertensive patients who met regularly with pharmacists, who provided medication, lifestyle counselling and monitored blood pressure.

The study took place at 38 community pharmacies across Ontario.

The results showed the program quadrupled the number of patients who were able to get their blood pressure under control, lowering the risk for heart attacks and strokes, the two groups said.

Moreover, 15 per cent more patients took their medication, while overall anti-hypertensive drug costs dropped by 31 per cent.

"This study demonstrates that when pharmacists are able to take a leadership role in supporting people living with chronic disease, they can make a difference – by improving the health of patients and delivering significant savings to the healthcare system," said **Dennis Darby**, CEO of the Ontario Pharmacists Association.

Steve Bradie, president and CEO at Green Shield Canada, said such a system could help companies control rising costs for private health care.

ONTARIO OPENING TRADE OFFICE IN SAO PAULO

John Michael McGrath

Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment **Eric Hoskins** announced Friday the opening of Ontario's foreign trade office in Sao Paulo, Brazil, a move that's part of the government's "Going Global" trade strategy.

The Sao Paulo office opens next week and joins centres already in place in France, China, Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, Britain and the United States.

That list in part explains the need for an office in Brazil's largest city and commercial centre, the government asserts: Aside from India and China, Ontario is currently represented only in G8 countries that are the province's traditional trading partners.

"Building our business with Brazil will translate into jobs for Ontario communities," Hoskins said. "The launch of the São Paulo office demonstrates our long-term commitment to the Brazilian market as we expand and diversify Ontario's international business profile."

Brazil is South America's largest country and the world's sixth-biggest economy and part of the so-called BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China – that are among the fastest-growing in the world. However, Canada currently does little trade with Brazil and competes on global markets with the South American giant in everything from mining and energy to aircraft and food products.

But with Brazil hosting the World Cup this year and then the Summer Olympics in 2016, business opportunities abound for Ontario companies in engineering services, information technology, banking and finance, infrastructure, agri-food and mining equipment.

The opening of trade offices in new countries is an effort, in part, to lessen the province's dependence on the U.S. market. Of the 6.4 per cent of Ontario companies that export goods, more than 75 per cent is sent to the United States, with just 2 per cent of exported goods shared between China, India and Brazil.

INSURERS SHELL OUT \$200M TO COVER ICE STORM DAMAGE

Staff

The ice storm that battered southern Ontario and Eastern Canada last month cost property and casualty insurers \$200 million in claims, marking 2013 as the most expensive ever for the industry.

A report Monday from the Insurance Bureau of Canada said the \$200 million in insured losses from the ice storm pushed the year-end loss caused by bad weather to \$3.2 billion, the highest in Canadian history.

More than half of that overall loss — or \$1.74 billion — was caused by the severe flooding in southern Alberta last June.

The insurance industry group said the 2013 loss came after four straight years of natural disasters that produced annual losses of \$1 billion or more.

"From the Alberta floods last summer to the ice storms in Ontario and Atlantic Canada over the holidays, frankly, bad weather hit insurers hard, too," **Don Forgeron**, the bureau's president and CEO, said in a statement. Most of the pre-Christmas ice storm losses were for homes damaged by falling trees, but insurers also paid out \$25 million for damaged cars, the bureau said.

In the wake of the ice storm that cut power to hundreds of thousands of customers, the Ontario government has received 27 requests from affected municipalities under the Ontario Disaster Relief Assistance Program for money to help pay for cleanup, response and recovery costs.

On Friday, the province sent a letter to Ottawa asking for assistance and a timetable to begin talks on federal help.

Other disasters in 2013 included the severe thunderstorm that hit central and southern Ontario and southwest Quebec in July and caused \$200 million in damages, and the June storms in Alberta that led to more than \$50 million in damages.

\$2.2 MILLION FOR HEALTHY FOOD IN SCHOOLS

Ashley Csanady

Education Minister **Liz Sandals** is offering \$2.2 million in grants to help high schools tempt students with healthier foods, whether that's in their cafeteria or an urban garden in the yard.

The program will fund grants of up to \$50,000 for school or boards to finance projects that encourage healthy eating. It's an effort to bolster the province's Healthy Schools Strategy, which Auditor General **Bonnie Lysyk** slammed as ineffective in her 2013 annual report.

Instead of eating the new, healthy options at schools, high-school students are simply heading to fast-food restaurants off-site, Lysyk found.

Responding to that criticism is part of the motivation for the new grants, Sandals said, as it's all about making those healthy options more appealing to teens. She said the projects should also involve students, whether it's designing a new menu, a healthy eating club or a partnership with a local culinary school to teach how to make more tasty, healthy meals from recipes.

"When we have healthy students, we have better students," Sandals said, adding that research shows teens who receive proper nutrition are proven to learn better. "We want to transform the food culture in our schools," she added.

RENOVATION TAX CREDITS COULD REDUCE UNDER-THE-TABLE WORK

Ashley Csanady

More home-renovation tax credits would encourage more Ontarians to use legitimate contractors, the Ontario Home Builders' Association said Thursday.

The association told the finance and economic affairs committee that the 2014 budget should crack down on the lost billions in the underground economy by encouraging customers to choose legitimate options — echoing Molly Maid International's push Tuesday for the same measures in the housecleaning services industry.

"We strongly encourage the provincial government to create broad-based incentives for consumers to fight the underground economy," said **Mike Collins-Williams**, the association's director of policy. He said it's difficult to

determine how many people are paying for home renovations in cash, but "it's literally billions" and the potential return for the treasury would be the same.

The Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit created last year is a good example of a government effort that helps bolster his industry and reduce the number of under-the-table work, he added. But a more general tax credit would help push even more customers, and in turn contractors, above board.

PEOPLE

Robert Andrews has been appointed chief executive of the Ontario Clean Water Agency.

Linda Lamoreux has been appointed executive chair of Safety, Licensing Appeals and Standards Tribunals Ontario for: the Animal Care Review Board, the Fire Safety Commission, the Licence Appeal Tribunal the Ontario Civilian Police Commission and the Ontario Parole Board.

Named as chair to the Health Professions Appeal and Review Board is **Taivi Lobu**

David Shearman, Douglas Lafreniere, Caroline MacIsaac and **Marie Leonard** have been named to the Health Unit Board.

Named to the Species at Risk Program Advisory committee are **Brian Anderson** and **Julie Cayley**.

Karen Cuss and **Daphne Simon** have been appointed to the Grant Review Team of the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Named to the board of the Ottawa Convention Centre corporation are: **Dick Brown, Annie Hillis, Maria Ricci** and **David Scott**.

Todd Miller has been named to the board of Science North (Centre).

Peter Nadeau has been named to the Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology board of governors.

FOR YOUR DIARY

- Jan. 28 PC MPP **Robbie Milligan's** Toronto Fundraiser "Robbie Burns Day"; The Caledonian, 856 College Street, Toronto; 6-8 p.m.
- Jan. 28 2014 International Privacy Day Event – Big Surveillance Demands Big Privacy; MaRS Discovery District, 101 College Street, Toronto; Registration 8:30 a.m.; 9:00 a.m.- 12:30 p.m.
- Feb. 1 Equal Voice is hosting its Annual General Meeting (AGM); Sheraton Hotel, O'Connor Room, 150 Albert St. Ottawa; 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.
- Feb. 6 An Evening with **Christine Elliott**, PC MPP, Whitby–Oshawa with guest speaker Federal Minister of Finance, the Hon. **Jim Flaherty** PC, MP; The York Club, 135 St. George Street, Toronto; 5:30-9:30 p.m.
- Feb. 12 Environmental Commissioner's 20th Anniversary Conference on Ontario's Environmental Bill of Rights; Great Hall, Hart House, University of Toronto; 8:30 a.m.- 4:00 p.m. [by invitation only]
- Feb.14 Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan (HOOPP) presentation and panel discussion on pension security; MaRS Discovery District, Auditorium, 101 College St. Toronto; 3:00-4:30 p.m.; Reception to follow.
- Feb.19 **Michael Mantha's** second annual "Taste of Algoma–Manitoulin" with special guest speaker **Gilles Bisson**, MPP, Timmins-James Bay; The University Club, 380 University Avenue, Toronto; 6-8 p.m.
- Mar.18 "An Evening with **Monte McNaughton**, MPP"; McCarthy Tetrault LLP, TD Bank Tower, 53rd Floor, 66 Wellington Street West, Toronto; 5:30–7:30 p.m.
- Mar. 20 Liberal Heritage Dinner 2014; Metro Toronto Convention Centre, South Building, 222 Bremner Blvd., Toronto; Reception 6:00 p.m.; Dinner 7:00 p.m.
- Mar.21-23 Ontario Liberal Party Annual General Meeting; Metro Toronto Convention Centre, South Building, 255 Front Street West, Toronto
- Mar.28-30 Broadbent Institute's first annual Progress Summit 'Paths to a New Prosperity' with keynote speaker **Julia Gillard**, former Prime Minister of Australia; Delta Hotel, 101 Lyon Street North, Ottawa

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