

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Time to change political fundraising rules in Ontario

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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As Premier Kathleen Wynne highlighted last June, it is time for Ontario to change the laws governing how Ontario's political parties raise funds.

I'd like to share a letter sent last Friday to leadership of the opposition and third party that will get that process moving ahead. I've edited it for brevity.

Minister Yasir Naqvi writes: The government has indicated its intent to introduce draft legislation this spring to reform the rules around political fundraising and electoral financing. There is a consensus among all parties that the system is in need of reform, and that this reform must come quickly. We have an opportunity before us to do just that.

The recent attention that has been paid to political fundraising by all parties has understandably fuelled cynicism amongst the constituents we serve.

No party is immune to this. I see no better way to help restore the public's trust than by coming together to do the job they elected us to do as parliamentarians.

The legislature has a robust and transparent process to allow us to introduce, debate and amend legislation. As the Premier has indicated, the government intends to take the added step of referring this particular piece of legislation to committee following first reading.

This step is taken infrequently. However, we feel it is justified given the importance of this bill.

The option of referring a bill to committee after first reading would enable Members to examine the principle of a bill, and to propose amendments that may dramatically alter its scope. We would not only have the opportunity to receive input from experts and stakeholders on the workings of legislation, we would also be giving the public a rare opportunity to provide input on what the policy itself should be.

I believe it is important that we hear as many voices as possible on the principle and the scope of this legislation. This is a discussion we welcome, is needed and should happen in the committee in order to demonstrate to Ontarians that their system works.

It is worth noting that after this broad discussion, the bill would receive second reading debate and would be referred back to committee for further public hearings and amendment. The goal would be for reforms to be in place by January 1, 2017. ?This is the process that MPPs were elected to uphold. I believe it is in our best interest to show Ontarians that we can come together to make it work for them. ?

On third party advertising: What should the spending limit be? What should the constraints on third party advertising be between elections? Should there also be an individual contribution limit for these advertising campaigns?

On the ban on corporate and union donations: Should there be a transitional subsidy based on vote counts from the previous election? If so, how long should the transition period be in order to allow all parties to adjust?

On donation limits: Should that lower limit be phased in over time? On by-election contributions: How should we manage by-elections that may occur before the legislation is in effect? On overall spending limits: What would an appropriate spending limit be during a writ period? On leadership and nomination campaigns: What should the spending and donation limits be?

This legislation presents us an opportunity to truly work together by doing the job we were sent here to do.

Around town

Queen's York Rangers

Congratulations to LCol Eric M. Thorson for his appointment Sunday as the new Commanding Officer of the Queen's York Rangers regiment, based in Aurora and Toronto. LCol Thorson served in the Regina Rifle Regiment, the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and the Canadian Airborne Regiment ? to name just a bit of his past. Thank you to former Commanding Officer LCol Phillip J. Halton for his service and dedication to the Regiment. (The event included an impressive Roll Past ? you can find a video of it on my Facebook page.)

142 St. Andrew's College Highland Cadet Corps

I'm always impressed when I attend the Church Parade for this historic local group, held this past Sunday at Trinity Anglican

Church. The Corps received a reaffirmation of its Freedom of the Town by Mayor Dawe.

Aurora Optimists

Thank you to the Aurora Optimists for its Third Annual beer tasting event Friday. The popular event featured products from nine craft brewers, and good music and food. Proceeds support the youth of Aurora

I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.