

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Reconciliation, subways and retirement

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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At 5:15 a.m., the sun is just beginning to light the Toronto skyline as I enter Queen's Park to participate in an indigenous-led sunrise ceremony.

On this Monday, indigenous people from across Ontario and a handful of MPPs are gathered in the park across from the Ontario Legislative Assembly to greet the sunrise in a traditional way, and use the event to set a positive tone for what is to happen inside the Legislative Assembly later that day. We smudge. We make a gift of tobacco. We contemplate the shared history of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Ontario.

Later, at 9 a.m. May 30, Premier Kathleen Wynne began an historic event in the house. The Premier formally apologized on behalf of the Government of Ontario for the brutalities committed for generations at residential schools and the continued harm this abuse has caused to Indigenous cultures, communities, families and individuals.

The Premier made the Statement of Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in the Legislative Assembly, with residential school survivors and First Nation, Métis and Inuit leaders in attendance. She apologized for the policies and practices supported by past Ontario governments, and the harm they caused; for the province's silence in the face of abuse and death at residential schools; and for residential schools being only one example of systemic intergenerational abuses and injustices inflicted upon Indigenous communities throughout Canada.

In recognition of this historic event and Ontario's nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples, the Legislature voted unanimously to open the floor to speeches from Opposition party leaders, Indigenous leaders ? and from Andrew Wesley, a residential school survivor who attended St. Anne's Indian Residential School in Fort Albany in his youth.

The Premier's apology is part of the government's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Final Report, released one year ago. Ontario is taking action to acknowledge one of the most shameful chapters in Canadian history and teach a new generation the truth about our shared history. The province released an action plan ? developed working closely with Indigenous partners ? that will help Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples move forward in a spirit of reconciliation.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report shone a light on Canada's residential school system, a dark chapter in our history with lasting impacts still felt by Indigenous people today. Ontario is working with Indigenous partners to address the legacy of residential schools, close gaps and remove barriers, create a culturally relevant and responsive justice system, support Indigenous culture, and reconcile relationships with Indigenous peoples. True reconciliation goes beyond the TRC's 'Calls to Action'. The Province will continue to look to Indigenous partners for guidance and leadership.

Ontario plans to invest more than \$250 million over the next three years on programs and actions focused on reconciliation, which will be developed and evaluated in close partnership with our Indigenous partners.

Subways

Many of us use the Yonge Street subway lines to get to and from work in Toronto. We all know the line is overcrowded and access is a problem. I'm pleased to see the province has earmarked \$55 million to continue the detailed design of an extended subway line that will, one day, run from the current Finch terminus to the Richmond Hill Centre Bus Station at Yonge Street and Highway 7. In addition to the funds for the Yonge Street extension, the Ontario government also provided \$155 million for planning and design work on a Yonge relief line. The proposed line, that will make it easier for Toronto riders to access Toronto's downtown core, will ease congestion on the Yonge Street line, currently operating beyond its maximum during rush hour.

Ontario is making the largest investment in public infrastructure in the province's history ? about \$160 billion over 12 years, which is supporting 110,000 jobs every year across the province, with projects such as roads, bridges, transit systems, schools and hospitals. In 2015, the province announced support for more than 325 projects that will keep people and goods moving, connect communities and improve quality of life.

Retirement

Ontario is expanding pension coverage to over four million workers without an adequate workplace pension plan. Last week, the province passed the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act (Strengthening Retirement Security for Ontarians), 2016. The Ontario Retirement Pension Plan (ORPP) will bring financial security and drive economic growth for generations to come, by providing

Ontario workers with a predictable stream of income in retirement, paid for life. The ORPP will also offer a survivor benefit for all plan members.

Along with regulations expected this summer, the legislation gives employers and employees the information they need to prepare for the launch of the ORPP. This is a crucial step forward in fulfilling the government's commitment that every eligible employee is part of the ORPP or a comparable workplace pension plan by 2020.

Brain tumour awareness

I am proud to have introduced a private members bill last week to designate May as Brain Tumour Awareness month in Ontario.

Each day, 27 Canadians hear "you have a brain tumour." Great strides have been made in past years. More needs to be done. I hope to have the bill pass second reading soon. I'll keep you informed.

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.