

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Government cutting debate on cannabis legislation

Last week, the Liberal government once again demonstrated that they have no interest in creating legislation that reflects the voice of the Ontarians.

The government introduced its cannabis legislation, Bill 174, as an omnibus bill with limited public consultation and they have now limited debate. This omnibus bill contains substantial and significant unrelated public policy provisions, such as school bus safety which has nothing to do with cannabis. The Liberal government decided to move ?Time Allocation? (the shortening of debate) on Bill 174 after only three Progressive Conservative MPPs had spoken to the legislation.

To address the concern of bundling many issues that should be addressed separately, a number of my Progressive Conservative colleagues have attempted to get the government to separate Bill 174, Cannabis, Smoke-Free Ontario and Road Safety Statute Law Amendment Act into three distinct pieces of legislation.

This would allow members to be able to craft legislation that would be the most effective in reaching the goal of keeping cannabis out of the hands of youth and reducing cannabis related criminal activity in Ontario.

This legislation is crucial because we need to ensure that after cannabis is made legal by the federal government, that there are measures in place to stop impaired driving. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has said that legalized cannabis will lead to more impaired driving. While there is widespread awareness about the problems with driving under the influence of alcohol, I have serious concerns that there is not enough awareness in place to ensure that drivers will be safe on the road, as cannabis becomes legal.

Another way the Wynne government is undermining the democratic process involved in producing legislation is limiting public input into the cannabis legislation. Incredibly, the government only provided opinion surveys online that were available for less than 20 days. By making the survey only available online and for such a short period of time, they stopped a substantial number of Ontarians from having their say on an issue that is going to have a serious impact on families and communities.

MPPs are elected to represent and advocate for their constituents. When the government limits their ability to debate on issues that will have significant impact on the lives of Ontarians, such as the cannabis legislation, they are essentially silencing the voices of thousands of Ontarians. Legalizing recreational cannabis and creating a cannabis retail corporation are transformational steps for Ontario. As such, it requires the robustness of a full debate to safeguard the public interest when we are taking on new policies. To quote Ontario PC House Leader Jim Wilson, ?This is one of the most critical public safety debates in our generation and the Liberals are using cynical legislative tactics to shut down debate and quiet the opposition.?

