

A change of pace

by SHERALYN ROMAN

As changes go, the pace of provincial cutbacks has slowed down a tad. In the past couple of weeks we've only seen major budget cuts to important line items like Workplace Health and Safety, the Ontario Provincial Police, Paramedic Services and Public Health Department budgets. You know, little things that will have virtually no impact on public safety or public health. Particularly when rising speed limits, legal pot-smoking, buck a beer available in corner stores and tailgate parties will have us all so preoccupied with partying that no one will even notice a pesky little outbreak of measles or the fact that you might not get to the hospital in time.

Let's start with Paramedics. Promising that, 'no paramedic in Ontario will lose their job' (hey Teachers does that sound familiar?) Christine Elliott says these cuts are about 'streamlining processes and empowering front line workers.' It appears however, that not a single one of those front line workers, or the union that represents them was consulted. I'm sure, as in any business, efficiencies might be gained through a thorough evaluation of services but I am equally sure there is nothing thorough about this government and their 'slash and burn' approach. Paramedic services, as those in Peel Region know only too well, vary from region to region for a variety of reasons including the geography of the location being served. Thankfully, Peel Region was not one of the locations chosen for the newly minted 110km/hr speed experiment because I'd be a little worried about the chances of my getting to the hospital in time were I involved in a high speed collision.

Speaking of high speeds, in a week that is supposed to be celebrating those who serve and protect us, instead a \$46 million dollar budget cut from the Ontario Provincial Police was announced. After all, I'm certain we'll require fewer police patrolling our major highways now that speed limits have been raised right? These funding cuts are 'largely from field and traffic services' according to a recent article, so clearly no one else is concerned about the impact of faster moving vehicles. Good job we've got paramedic services. Oh 'wait?'

Speaking of moving fast and health care, I hope you weren't in a hurry to get to work because the office that works under the umbrella of Workplace Health and Safety to prevent workplace deaths and injuries just had their budget slashed by \$16 million dollars. For the record, that money, according to a recent Toronto Star article, doesn't even come from taxpayer dollars in the first place and will have no impact on the provincial bottom line. Surely you all agree that research into how to make workplace deaths preventable is of no particular use to anyone.

Still speaking of health, if you're lucky enough to not have been injured on the job, you might be missing work for a different reason 'because Public Health Departments are being merged at an alarming rate' especially those right here close to home. Guelph, Waterloo, Peel and Halton Regions have each been advised that they will be merging. Ironically, only after notification by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, were they then told a working group to help establish boundaries and finalize merger plans would be struck. Shouldn't that happen before major announcements that potentially impact thousands? Like I said at the start of this article, don't let that pesky measles outbreak interrupt your daily routine 'we have public health units to protect us. Oh 'wait?'

Two songs come to mind; 'Life is a highway, I wanna ride it all night long?' and 'Don't worry, be happy.' Perhaps Mr. Ford has a constant playlist running on a loop through the back of his mind, a playlist that influences the decisions he makes. Hurtling down the highway at 110km/hr with Tom Cochrane blaring on the radio is fun and the good news is there won't be any police patrolling to pull you over. As for your health, if you're injured on the job or struggling as a new mom and desperate for a visit from the public health nurse, you can always visit your local, legal, pot dispensary instead and all your worries will simply go up in smoke. If that's not enough to help get you through the day, 'Don't worry, Be happy' and go grab a buck a beer from your local corner store and have a tailgate party. After all, the Raptors are still in the play-offs. That's something.