

Budget? What Budget?

Written by Sheralyn Roman

By the time we go to press we'll be in the throes of the first major budget announcement of the Progressive Conservative government here in Ontario and what is everyone talking about? Tailgating! A party? This is what we are talking about in advance of budget day? Can you say distraction? I've got to hand it to Mr. Ford he sure knows how to draw attention away from the major issues ? indeed crisis ? currently facing Ontarians. You know, the little things like drastic cuts to education that will only have a very minor impact on our future. (Yes, if you don't know me by now I am being very sarcastic.) Like the classic ?bait and switch? technique used during the election when all we were all talking about was ?buck a beer?, Mr. Ford has managed, with just one announcement, to distract us poor common folk from the major issues of the day, encouraging us instead to talk about getting drunk and eating lots of charred food at an outdoor venue. Sounds like the kind of parties the Ford's used to host back in the day don't you think?

My concerns around tailgating are twofold. One ? distraction from the issues at hand and two ? drunk driving. To quote an oft used phrase, while ?the government has no place in the bedrooms of the nation,? they do have a place in patrolling our major roads and highways and taking on the responsibility of helping protect ALL of us from the FEW of us who still choose to drink and drive. I'd like to think we are all responsible enough to party at the foot of our cars without incident but some of us won't be and that's a problem for everyone. Additionally, distraction. Did I mention that already? These last few days have been spent talking about nothing but tailgating instead of issues like climate change, carbon taxes and cuts to education. You all remember, I hope, that a massive rally took place on April 6th protesting the enormous changes to our education system? Are we still talking about that? I've seen (and shared) some of the rumblings on social media but it seems like many folks have moved on. It's spring! Let's drink beer! Buck a beer, out of the trunk of the car! (Sounds like what some people I know did in high school to me. Perhaps Doug is simply looking to relive his ?glory year? - Grade 11 wasn't it?)

Can we please get back to the real issues? I know there are many deserving of our attention but education has to be top of the list or close to it. This is our future. The kinds of cuts we're facing now will impact students and teachers immediately and for generations to come. Taking away supports for autism spectrum children potentially limits their future opportunities. Changing the structure of full day kindergarten (and who provides leadership in that environment) after millions has just been spent on implementing it, is both costly and questionable. Asking Teachers to manage classrooms of 35 and 40 students is just outrageous. If there is a parent amongst you who hasn't thrown your hands up in despair managing just one teenager at home then you aren't parenting right. It's hard work. Now add 39 more to the mix ? and try teaching them something like physics or Shakespeare. Good luck.

Asking Teachers and our Boards of Education to do more with less will also impact special programming and extra-curricular activities. I was a ?band nerd.? (I'm not suggesting band members are nerds but that is what my husband used to call me.) I'm proud I was in the band. You know what being a band nerd got me? Exposure to musical theatre, to the opera, to Roy Thompson Hall and to a wide range of concerts and experiences I would never have otherwise been able to attend. Trips to New York City, to Florida and all around the province of Ontario to compete, to learn and to grow. These were amazing experiences that broadened the mind.

What about the kids who are not destined for University. We own a Tool and Die related business, have done for the past 20+ years. My husband was introduced to this skilled trade by taking machine shop in high school. He apprenticed, worked hard and now owns a successful business. You know what we can't do? Hire someone like him. There are no programs in schools, no ?machine shops? and what precious few SHSM programs that currently exist are exactly the kinds of programs that might face extinction under the Ford government. These cuts aren't just about autism and special needs ? much as those children and families desperately need help ? they are also about investing in our future for skilled trades, for kids who learn differently ? for kids who don't want a post-secondary degree. They are about Teachers trying to reach and connect with those kids so they don't feel defeated and drop out but instead are inspired to see a different future for themselves.

Please don't take the bait. Buck a beer wasn't the issue during the election and tailgating isn't the issue now. Drunk driving seems, if anything, to be on the rise with York Region officers recently expressing shock that they are still pulling over so many impaired

drivers even after their region experienced the most public (and horrific) drunk driving case in recent years. Cheap beer and the ability to drink it near your car, outside a major sporting event, certainly won't improve those statistics. Let's talk about education instead. Let's talk about what really matters ? future generations and their future potential.