

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? Premier included on witness list in horse breeder's case

Horse racing and equestrian sports have a long history in Canada and in Dufferin-Caledon.

In fact, July 1 marked the 250th anniversary of Canadian horse racing.

In Dufferin-Caledon, there are many horse breeders and stables across the riding. This industry's contribution to our community continued when the Caledon Equestrian Park played host to the 2015 Pan-Am Games' Equestrian competitions.

A group of Ontario standardbred horse breeders are currently in a court battle with the Province of Ontario over the abrupt cancellation of the Slots at Racetracks Program in 2012 and are seeking \$65 million in damages. Now the group is calling for Premier Kathleen Wynne and the former Premier Dalton McGuinty to appear as witnesses at the trial.

In 2012, the Ontario government abruptly announced the cancellation of the Slots at Racetracks Program (SARP), which effectively removed about \$300 million in annual funding for the horse racing industry in Ontario. The Slots and Racetracks Program began in 1998 when the government was looking to put slot machines in locations other than charity casinos and restaurants. SARP provided a revenue sharing agreement, with the province receiving 75 per cent, the local municipality receiving five per cent and the horse racing industry receiving 20 per cent, with the goal of generating reinvestment into the breeding and racing industry.

When the government cancelled SARP, racetracks received some compensation from the government. Standardbred breeders did not. A key component of the breeders' allegations is that the government's decision did not consider the five-to-seven-year cycle needed to produce a standardbred racing horse from conception to the start gate. The breeders allege that this timeline makes the mere one-year notice given to the breeders particularly damaging to their industry. This meant that the value of their horses diminished substantially and quickly, and that crucially, Premier Wynne and former Premier McGuinty were aware of this harm. The province and the OLG deny all allegations of wrongdoing in their statements of defence.

Unfortunately, this news joins a growing trend of the provincial government being in court. The current government has already faced five OPP investigations. The government has also lost a \$28 million lawsuit to Windstream and lost \$179 million in a court case with energy producers. The government's political action and policy mistakes are reducing their integrity and taking money out of the pockets of taxpayers.

This court case also adds to the increasing difficulty individuals in the agriculture, and agri-food industries are having under this government. I have heard from many rural business owners and farmers that skyrocketing hydro rates and the burden of unnecessary regulations have negatively impacted their ability to continue to provide jobs and employment in Dufferin-Caledon.

This government has failed rural and agricultural businesses and families, and this recent development further underscores how the government's decisions are hurting rural families and businesses. The Premier needs to take action to restore faith in her government.

