

Residents should be concerned about Bill 66

OUR READERS WRITE

The Ford government has been in power for over six months and its troubles continue to pile up. Two problems hit very close to home, and the residents of Dufferin-Caledon should be alarmed.

The first involves Bill-66. The bill, called 'Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act' sounds reasonable enough. Yet according to environmentalists, not to mention most of the major media outlets and the opposition at Queen's Park, this act would allow commercial development to bypass several long standing laws that were put in place to protect the environment. Many of these laws were enacted as a result of the Walkerton disaster in the early 2000s.

During the election campaign Ford promised not to develop the green belt. With this act, it appears the Ford PCs will give the go-ahead to developers to do just that. The fact is that Ford was caught on video promoting the development of the green belt to various business leaders. He was forced to go back on this promise only when he was exposed by this recording. Bill-66 seems to illuminate Ford's real intention to help developers make lots of money at the expense of the environment, and the safety of the people who live here.

Even more concerning is the hiring of the new OPP commissioner. The incoming commissioner, Supt. Ron Taverner is a personal friend of Doug Ford. It has been reported that the qualifications sought for the position of commissioner had to be revised to allow for Supt. Taverner to apply and successfully win the post. The current OPP Interim Commissioner, Brad Blair has raised several concerns that point to the possibility of political interference in the selection of Taverner.

This point is crucial. It was not the media or any of the opposition parties, including us, who first asked the Ontario Ombudsman to examine the matter. It's the leadership of the OPP itself. As reported in the Toronto Star, Blair stated 'it is clear to me that as the current commissioner I must put my service to the OPP ahead of personal ambition in order to repair the apprehension of bias over this process and the potential damage to the reputation of the OPP'.

In effect, the outgoing OPP Interim Commissioner suggested that this appointment was engineered by the Premier, and therefore, has the stink of political interference. Indeed, Ford himself admitted that the government lowered the requirements for the commissioner job to attract a wider range of candidates. However, Blair says that the original job posting attracted 27 applicants.

Blair goes on to point out that Ford's chief of staff, Dean French asked the OPP to buy a 'large camper-type vehicle' from a sole source, and have it modified to the specs of the Premier's office. Alarming, French asked that the cost for this vehicle should be, 'kept off the books'. If this allegation is true, this is another clear example of politicians directing the OPP to do their bidding, and to hide their actions after the fact.

Why are these two issues so important to the people of this riding in particular? The green belt issue has obvious connections. But Blair's concerns fall right on the desk of our own Sylvia Jones. She is the Minister of Community Safety and she must respond to Blair's allegations. If they are baseless, she can clear up the matter through a public explanation.

On two occasions, Dec. 12 and 17, the CBC asked her to appear on the show to shed light on this matter. As reported by Matt Galloway, the host of Metro Morning, she simply did not return their calls. These are very serious issues facing the people of Dufferin-Caledon. I would hope that Minister Jones will soon address the concerns of the people who elected her. Perhaps she could make clear her position in this paper next week.

I hope she is not counting on the people of this riding to forget these issues.

She can be sure we won't.

Mark Hauck,

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