

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: College students our concern

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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College students should be back in the classroom by now and, under the guidance of teachers, working hard to catch up on lost instruction time.

Since the strike began, my focus has been on students and their learning and wellbeing. Students were in the middle of this strike for too long, and it just wasn't fair to them. Our government firmly believes in the collective bargaining process. In fact, we supported the parties throughout the process in their attempts to find a negotiated settlement.

However, when they informed us they were deadlocked, we moved forward with legislation, passed Sunday, that refers all outstanding issues in the labour negotiation to a mediator-arbitrator.

Let's be clear, our government is very supportive of Ontario's college system. In 2016-17, the government allocated \$1.47 billion in total operating grants to Ontario's colleges.

While college enrollment has increased by almost 25 per cent since 2002, total operating grants to colleges have increased by more than 82 per cent during the same time. In fact, per-student funding for colleges has increased from \$4,600 in 2003 to \$6,624 in 2017 ? an increase of 45 per cent. Let's support students as they return to the classroom for a top-notch education.

2017 Ontario Economic
Outlook and Fiscal Review

Last week Ontario released its 2017 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review. The plan continues to create fairness and opportunity for people across the province and outlines new measures to grow the economy and help people thrive in an uncertain global environment.

The government is on track to balance the budget this year, as well as the next two years. A balanced budget means more funding for the programs and services people rely on most, like health care and education. To continue strengthening health care, Ontario is set to launch the most significant expansion of medicare in a generation with OHIP+: Children and Youth Pharmacare.

Starting January 1, OHIP+ will provide free prescription medications for everyone under 25, ensuring parents never have to choose between paying for their children's prescription drugs and providing other essentials. The province is also ensuring that seniors are able to access the services they need at every stage of their lives. Aging with Confidence: Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors includes a \$155-million investment over three years.

Investments continue to be made in Education, Skills and Training. Starting this school year, more than 210,000 college and university students are receiving free tuition thanks to the new Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). The province will continue to support young people as they begin their careers and transition to the workforce, Ontario is providing new incentives for businesses to employ youth.

Beginning in 2018, the province will provide \$124 million over three years in supports for youth aged 15 to 29 to support employer hiring and retention. A small business with fewer than 100 employees would receive a \$1,000 incentive for hiring a young worker and a \$1,000 incentive for retaining that worker for six months.

Small business is vital to the growth of Newmarket-Aurora and the province. One-third of all workers in Ontario are employed by small businesses. The province is helping to build a dynamic and competitive business environment by providing more than \$500 million over three years in new initiatives to lower costs for small businesses and promote growth. This includes the proposed 22 per cent cut to the Corporate Income Tax rate for small businesses.

Sports Hall of Fame Inductees

Last week both the Newmarket and Aurora Sports Hall of Fames recognized this year's inductees. Aurora inducted William Fleury, Mike Palmateer, Bob Wall and Dan Thompson. Newmarket inducted Jim Richardson, Pete Orr and the NewmarketRedmen Burgess Wholesale Minor Hockey teams. Congratulations to all of the athletes recognized in these ceremonies, not only for their athletic prowess, but also for the on-going contributions they make to our towns.

CYFS Recognition Ceremony

Central York Fire Services (CYFS) is a full time fire department that provides protection to the Town of Aurora and the Town of Newmarket. CYFS serves a combined population of approximately 146,000 and covers an area of 90 square kilometres. The department responds to approximately 5,000 emergency calls each year. CYFS operates out of four fire stations, two in Aurora and two in Newmarket and recently held a staff recognition ceremony. Recognized firefighters included: Firefighter Bill Burkholder (35 years), Captain Alex Doak (30 years), Acting Platoon Chief John Hopkinson (25 years), Firefighter Brad Humfryes (25 years), Firefighter Jerry Madaleno (25 years), Platoon Chief Dan Waters (20 years), Acting Platoon Chief Jeff Lee (20 years), Captain Frank Huberty (20 years), Acting Captain Corey Hanna (20 years) and Firefighter Al Cook (20 years). Promotions included Captain Jason Shepstone and a welcome to the new firefighters: Steven Donovan, Christopher Karagiannis, Thomas Hendy, Michael Hutten, Adamo Marcangelo, Aaron Ham, Josh Tibbitts, Adamo Cassullo and Daniel Middleton. On a sad note, I offer my condolences to the family and friends of firefighter Chris Lowe. Mr. Lowe died while off-duty November 17. Assigned to Aurora Fire Hall 4-3, Mr. Lowe was a dedicated firefighter and was well liked by his peers.

Aurora Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards

The Aurora Chamber of Commerce recognized some well deserving business in our community. Congratulations to Business Excellence winners Aurora Orthodontics and Whitehots Inc., Community Involvement winner MR Menswear, New Business Venture winner Artistica Ballroom Dance Studio, Non-Profit of the Year winner CHATS and Trailblazer winner Food in Motion.

As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.