

## **2015 Convention Report – Legislation By Linda Squarzolo**

Being the chair of the Legislation Standing Committee has proved to be very interesting.

Ontario Bill 45 – Making Healthier Choices, regulates the use and sale of flavoured and electronic cigarettes. This issue was addressed by national resolutions in 2014. Ontario is one province that has enacted legislation to control these products.

Several private members bills have been introduced. One bill of particular interest is Bill 75 – Microbead Elimination and Monitoring Act.

Since some issues are the responsibility of the federal government, we also need to watch what is happening in Ottawa. Charlie Angus, MP Timmins-James Bay, has been a very vocal advocate for the aboriginal people he serves. He has raised concerns about the lack of adequate housing, the flooding of the communities every spring, the social concerns and the inadequate educational facilities.

Although education is a provincial responsibility, the federal government oversees all aboriginal affairs, including the schooling of First Nations youth. Mr. Angus outlined the problems faced by the children in Attawapiskat, when their school was condemned, because of a fuel leak in the heating system. Since the 1970's, these students were forced to attend classes in portable buildings. In 2008, a young girl, Shannen Koostachin, approached the government about this problem. She asked to have safe and comfy schools. Shannen led protests in her home community and became the Rosa Parks of her generation speaking out for educational improvements. She was nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize. Sadly, Shannen died in a traffic accident in 2010. Her friends initiated "Shannen's Dream" a Canadian youth driven movement to advocate for equitable educational funding for First Nations students.

In 2012 Motion 201 was introduced in the House of Commons. The motion stated that the government should adopt Shannen's Dream by providing funding equal to that of provincial schools, proper resources and policies to develop high-quality, culturally-relevant education. The motion was passed unanimously. The good news is that a new school was built in Attawapiskat and opened in October 2014. The bad news is that 219 other communities have indicated that they also need new buildings and no funding increases have been allocated. We must lend our voices to resolve this issue.

I have to say that the absolute highlight of my time on the Ontario Provincial Council occurred in June of this year. Everyone has heard of Dorothy in the Land of Oz in her ruby slippers. Well, picture Linda, in her red shoes in the Land of Queen's Park – one member of the Ontario Provincial Council's delegation, to meet government officials to discuss League resolutions. Four meetings were scheduled: with government ministers, with a deputy minister and with the parliamentary assistant to an opposition leader. Each of them received us graciously, listened to our concerns, answered our questions and even shared special projects that they were developing. We were personally welcomed and shook hands with Premier Kathleen Wynne. During Question Period were given VIP seating and were introduced as guests. What an exciting and rewarding day! It took my ruby slippers a few days to come back to earth.

There is great work being done across this province by diocesan and parish legislation chairs. They are educating members about the issues and writing to government. However, it makes me sad to realize that many councils are not able to find members to fill the legislation positions. If they only knew how interesting it is, what a difference they could make and the great time they are missing!