**Government Meetings – Ontario Provincial Council** March 26 and 27, 2012

Committee Members:

Marlene Pavletic, Provincial President; Betty Colaneri, Provincial President-Elect; Shari Guinta, Past Provincial President; Anne Madden, Resolutions Chairperson; and Colleen Randall, Legislation Chairperson.

Mr. Gerretson’s office assisted with our attendance at question period on March 26th and introduced us in the house. Question period started with the Our Father and reflection by the Speaker.

**Attorney General: John Gerretsen**

(Senior advisor – communications: Elaine Flis, Katie Millan, Cory Quaresma, and Ian Shaw)

Mr. Gerretsen was very engaging and we were very well received. He mentioned that his sisters are members of the CWL and he is a member of the Cathedral Parish in Kingston. We were not rushed at all and enjoyed our conversation.

* Mr. Gerretsen commented about the prostitution bill and expressed disappointment in its passing. The delegation was unaware of this bill and its debate.
* Bicycle Helmets: asked the attorney general about the status and he seemed unaware of the status and policy. We stated that it was important to have properly fitted bike helmets for everyone and he said that his office would look into it. He recommended: Bob Chiarelli – Minister of Transportation/Minister of Infrastructure.
* Right now the law states that smoking is permitted outside if there is no canopy. We reiterated that we would like to see a further ban – everywhere. This is a serious health issue. Smoking, on one side provides revenue for the government, but on the other side the health costs are long term and serious. He mentioned that this could be restricted in condo and apartments. S. Guinta mentioned that the Region of Waterloo has restricted smoking in all subsidized units in the region. Condos would be more difficult to legislate.
* Energy drinks: this disturbed him.
* He had read the brief and he also mentioned drinking water for first nations. Water testing *– ND Tech* is portable testing unit and able to test water anywhere (mobile unit on site).
* Problem with dealing with aboriginal communities is the structure of the leadership in the community. There are other levels of legislation such as the Indian Act. Due to ice- flow flooding, a community on James Bay will have to be moved.
* M. Pavletic mentioned that the Ring of Fire is an issue that the aboriginal community needs to have input into and he responded that it is essential to have them part of the equity position and have them part owner, to benefit in a permanent way.
* Mr. Gerretsen expressed interest in the League and asked about our conventions and said that if we want to change things we do need to speak collectively.
* A. Madden brought up about the sodium resolution and he agreed that it is a problem.

**Minister of Education – Laurel Broten (not available)**

Dawn Lavigne, policy advisor for Education – Ms. Lavigne was very interested and engaging. She listened and asked us questions and took notes. She was interested in the resolution process and asked questions. Miss Lavigne referred to the Drummond Report and stated that it will affect all ministries.

* A. Madden asked if all day kindergarten was confirmed and will go through and we were told yes. Miss Lavigne gave some background, stating it will be phased in to all schools by 2014.
* Physical Education in elementary schools – didn’t think that a formal position has been taken and she would look into it and let us know if anything is moving forward.
* M. Pavletic brought up Bill 13 and gave an overview of our concern regarding the bill. Miss Lavigne was not versed on the bill and recommended that we speak with the provincial advocate for children and youth for collaboration (Irwin Elman)
* C. Randall mentioned the OCTA document “Respecting Differences”.
* S. Guinta gave her the Education Poster and asked that she give it to the minister.
* Dawn asked if we met with other organizations for sharing of info and collaboration.
* She is now doing policy on women’s issues and she informed us that the Sexual Violence Action Plan has been recently launched and they would be interested in getting feedback on it.
* There was discussion about education for those in subsidized housing about life skills issues. Dawn promised to follow up on several contacts for us including Eric Hoskins, Minister of Children and Youth Services.

**Minister of Energy – Christopher Bentley**. The meeting was structured, factual and business like.

* Wind turbines: the Green Energy review was launched last week and this deals with dirty coal. Green energy is growing.
* Said there were problems with lack of capacity on the grids in the past with use of wind turbines. But there is now a process with a point system which encourages interaction with the municipalities
* A. Madden asked about health issues concerning wind turbines and Mr. Bentley said that to date there are no known health issues but the University of Waterloo is doing research on this.
* Smart meters and the concerns of costs to those who are home all day such as seniors, stay-at-home families and those who are infirmed. He said that the technology surrounding smart meters is just beginning. A smart grid is being developed and current infrastructure is being improved so that smart meters can be used efficiently. He said that he would get back to us on the exemption for those who have to use electricity at prime time. Smart meters are relative to a smart grid, which is being developed.

**Minister of Natural Resources – Michael Gravelle (not available)**

Strategic Communications and Stakeholder Relations Advisor – Cortney Pasternak.

Ms. Pasternak was new to position and could not really supply any information.

* This office deals with legislation regarding natural resources. She mentioned that there is often collaboration with federal level, other ministries, that they are rarely the lead.
* Involved in emergency issues and policy development to ensure development is based in a sustainable way.

**NDP Chief Whip Recognized Party, Critic, Women’s Issues, Community and Social Services -Cheri DiNovo,** was ill and the meeting was cancelled.

**Minister of Community and Social Services and Government House Leader – John Milloy**

We were very well received. He is a Catholic and active in his parish in Kitchener.

* S. Guinta mentioned the concern for those in subsidized housing who have few supports and that the Ontario Works recipients are more often encouraged not to work so that benefits are not cut. This is a complex issue.
* He mentioned that the Commission for Social Assistance in Ontario with Munir Sheikh and Frances Lankin are looking into this very issue. An interim review discussion paper is in the works. He agreed that the problem is not an easy one. There is no transition to the work force and are working to “fix it”.
* Social Assistance review is the biggest issue under his ministry, a copy of the discussion paper will be sent to us for comment.

**Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Aboriginal Affairs – Kathleen Wynne**

Andrew Hurd - Senior Policy Advisor

This meeting gave everyone an uncomfortable feeling. We were instructed to sit on one side of the boardroom table only and Minister Wynne was confrontational. She started by referring to aboriginal suicide rates and to suicide rates amongst teen gays and wanted our “stand” on the issue concerning gay straight alliances. She stressed that gay straight alliances in schools are provincial policy and it is their position and we need to hear it from as many ministers as possible. Although the Respecting Differences document was referred to by the delegation, the minister dismissed it.

* A. Madden asked about the potable water issue with First Nations as a follow-up to our resolution ON.11.01. Minister Wynne said that the province responds in emergency situations as a follow up to federal lead and Ontario has partnered with the federal government to provide funds for a pilot project in Attawapiskat, which will evaluate a new filter system for water. The Ontario Clean Water Agency is the 1st response for first nations regarding water. She also brought up that there is an ongoing program called Emergency Response Ontario that has already helped with changes on reserves. Her concern is that infrastructure is a serious issue and is a federal responsibility. She has visited the reserves.
* Minister Wynne referred to chronic underfunding from the federal government, stating that communication is a problem.
* Housing was discussed. Ms. Wynne mentioned that a national housing policy is needed. It is important to have CCAC, LHINs and Service Managers all work together at the municipal level and important for us to be engaged. She said that turf wars need to be broken down. If we can’t understand it locally it won’t work federally.

**Minister of Health and Long Term Care - Deb Matthews (not available)**

Brigid Buckingham and Tim Smitheman Senior Policy Advisors.We were warmly welcomed and we all felt comfortable.

* Anne Madden mentioned ON.11.02 the resolution on sodium. We were told that the Minister is meeting with other ministers to recommit to implement sodium reduction policy and they are waiting for national standards for sodium levels. We should follow up on this nationally.
* Childhood obesity – to reduce childhood obesity over 5 years by 25%. This came out last fall in a platform commitment.
* Colorectal cancer – ON.11.03. Cancer Care Ontario is to implement policies and do cancer screening. They want information sharing and support of best practice. Age target is 50-74 years. 41% of all eligible are to be screened by end of year.
* Thermology testing for breast cancer. They were not familiar with this but they are dealing with a whole cancer strategy and awareness. Age is lowered for testing to 30 years. Tim will look into the thermology testing and get back to us.
* Focus for this ministry is on prevention and health promotion.
* Patient Based Hospital Funding: Implementing on April 1st. Funding will be based on patient specific treatments- “patients first”. Rural and remote hospitals will still receive base funding and will not be affected. They are trying to move away from fee for service funding.
* Smoking on patio: Tim mentioned that this is up to municipality and there seems to be a reduction in smoking.
* Caffeine in drinks: asked if anything being done, informed that this is federal issue. Public Health department can give education on this.
* Bill 39 – Concussion Strategy Management – they mentioned this. Spear-headed by Ministry of Education and they are working with other agencies including schools and sports associations.
* Sun tanning beds: Tim said there hasn’t been anything of late provincially but will check it out for us. This falls under Consumer Affairs.
* Bill 48 – Alzheimer’s Advisory Council Act. This is a private member’s bill by Cheri DiNovo. We commended the government on this bill and expressed our support.
* Bill 30 – Care Givers Bill: Tim said this falls under Ministry of Labor, Linda Jefferies and he will follow up.

**Conclusion:**

These were beneficial meetings. All ministries were receptive and forthcoming with information and engaging. Most promised follow –up and we found staff to be very helpful. We learned much and will try to refine our meetings in the future.

Attending question period was “entertaining” and gives the League a profile through being introduced in the House gallery.

**Recommendations:**

Resolutions and Legislation Chairs should work together in setting these meetings.

More background work should be done prior to appointments to streamline and facilitate discussion on current topics. (start early, following the National Convention)

Recommendations for the strategy of the meetings should be in place by the fall executive meeting to allow feedback and input from the standing chairs.

Emailing the briefs to the various offices prior to the meetings is very helpful.

It would be good to get topics well in advance and research should be done as to which office or ministry is the best to meet with concerning the issues.

Meet after the meetings to debrief and put the draft report together.

**Follow up**

A gift basket was sent to Mr. Gerretsen’s office to thank them for all of their help and the resolutions chair will send a thank you letters to each office that we met with. The prayer for elected officials was included with the letter.

**Thank you**

A special thank you to Mary Yoannidis, Senior Advisor, Stakeholder and Operations, for Hon Minister John Gerretsen, who assisted with the final details and securing our passes into Question Period.