

# Ontario premier at the beck and call of unions

By Christina Blizzard, October 3, 2013

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TORONTO - A powerful union boss told Premier Kathleen Wynne to jump this week.

She asked, "How high?" - and meekly did just that.

Ironically, it all fit with the message PC leader Tim Hudak was trying to get out about third-party advertising during elections.



Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne

Credits: CRAIG ROBERTSON/QMI

Big unions have poured millions of dollars into attack ads by the union-backed Working Families Coalition. The WFC has targeted Conservative leaders since Ernie Eves. Hudak, naturally, would like that to end.

Oddly, though, it wasn't that news conference that highlighted the overwhelming power of union politics.

That was left to another controversial issue percolating here involving construction giant EllisDon.

Since 1958 EllisDon has been banned from using non-union workers on construction projects.

That puts the company at a huge competitive disadvantage and it's time to give EllisDon a break. Last year, an Ontario Labour Relations Board ruling upheld the 55-year-old ruling.

On Friday, however, an Ontario Divisional Court ruling sided with EllisDon, quashing the OLRB ruling.

Meanwhile, Tory MPP Monte McNaughton introduced a private member's bill recently that would settle the issue once and for all - and put an end to the old deal.

The legislature was set to pass the new law as one of a number of bills Liberals and Tories agreed to collaborate on.

Then the unions leaned on Wynne.

Their chief bully-boy, Patrick Dillon, is not just up to his hip-waders in the WFC attack mud, he's also on the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (\$275 per diem). And he's on the board of Infrastructure Ontario (\$500 per diem). He's a busy boy. As well as being the business manager of the Building & Construction Trades Council, the Liberals have appointed Dillon to the board of their latest boondoggle - the College of Trades. And Wynne has appointed him to be one of 13 members of her panel of usual suspects advising on transit taxes. His payment for the last two panels hasn't been disclosed.

Dillon wrote a letter to MPPs recently, urging them not to back the change the EllisDon legislation.

He claimed the change, "undermines the rule of law."

Well, no, it doesn't.

The court has already sided with EllisDon, so it's actually the OLRB that's undermining the rule of law.

And the law is out of date.

It's unfair to expect one company to abide by antiquated rules, while foreign-based competitors can come in and undercut them with cheaper labour.

Wynne backed away from the bill Wednesday, claiming the court ruling makes it unnecessary.

"I ... believe that this bill is no longer needed. We will not be supporting it. I will not be supporting it, assuming that the decision is not appealed," she said.

Well, isn't that a clever way to get out of a politically difficult decision? Don't do anything and tell the government lawyers not to appeal. But don't, whatever you do, knock a bad old law on the head, the way you should.

Oh, and by the way, EllisDon also donated big time to Wynne's leadership campaign - \$10,000 through their residential and design built arms.

"If this legislative change doesn't happen, then EllisDon is going to be at a competitive disadvantage against Spanish companies and U.S. companies," McNaughton said yesterday.

"It irks me to see government making decisions based on one union leader," he said.

McNaughton said it was the Liberals and Wynne who asked for the bill to be included in the bundle of laws the two parties agreed to fast-track through the legislature.

So the Liberals, who originally were on-side to push through this legislation are backing away from it under pressure from their powerful union buddies - and trying to make the Tories look like the bad guys because one of their members brought it forward.

It's just one more craven act of cowardice by a government that owes much of its success at the polls to the massive financial support it gets from unions.

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