

## COMMENT

## No commitments made to Olivier

Glenn Thibeault's candidacy open effort in team-building



KATHLEEN WYNNE

I am very proud of Glenn Thibeault, who was elected as the MPP for Sudbury in the recent byelection. He has been a strong advocate for his community for many years, in many roles. We respect and thank the people of Sudbury for their faith in Glenn, and will strive every day to live up to and honour their decision.

There has been, and continues to be, controversy surrounding the process leading up to Glenn's candidacy. I take this matter very seriously, and I want to give you a clear statement of the situation from my perspective.

The opposition parties are claiming that I promised to do politics differently, but have failed to do so. In fact, the reason we are even having this discussion is that I am committed to conducting myself and my government in an open, straightforward manner.

I have been a failed candidate in a nomination race that was designed for another candidate to win. This experience convinced me that, while nominations should be open and locally controlled, if the leader has chosen the candidate there should be an appointment, not a sham nomination. That is the honest course of action.

This was the case in Sudbury. Andrew Olivier was the Liberal candidate in the June general election. When the seat became vacant late last year, I wanted to make sure we had the best candidate available to represent Sudbury at Queen's Park.

I became aware Glenn would consider running for us. Once I met Glenn, I was convinced he was the right candidate for us. It was then, last November and well before any conversation with Andrew Olivier, that I decided to appoint our candidate.

Having made that decision, we moved to decide the timing of the byelection and prepare our campaign. We also had a number of conversations with the past candidate. And let me be very clear on this point: Andrew Olivier was absolutely aware during those conversations that he would not be the candidate. He was not being asked to step aside, because it had already been clearly communicated to him that Glenn was being appointed as the candidate.

The conversations were an attempt to keep Andrew Olivier involved. I felt strongly that he needed to hear from me that we wanted him to be involved in the Liberal Party and politics, but that I had already made a decision to appoint someone else.

Pat Sorbara spoke with Andrew Olivier after I told him I would be appointing Glenn as the candidate, and she also made suggestions about how he might stay involved. But at no time were any commitments made.

I did not need to speak with Andrew Olivier. He could have read about our decision in the newspaper. That would have been old-style politics. Instead, I wanted to be honest with him and I wanted him to stay involved. But at no time was I prepared to offer him anything to do so.

All of this is being questioned at the moment and I will continue to answer these questions. But I also want to be clear that all of this is taking place in a political context, where, on all sides of the House, attempts have been made to keep people involved and part of the team.

And, over the past two years, members of both opposition parties have approached my team, suggesting they would vacate their seats if we would guarantee an appointment. We refused each time.

When opposition members made these entreaties, my staff was adamant we reject any such notion. They are fine people with an explicit commitment to honest politics. Pat Sorbara, particularly, is a seasoned professional and a woman of integrity.

If charges are laid at some point as a product of the investigation, then Pat would of course step aside. We don't expect that to happen but it will be up to others to decide. In the meantime, we will not force someone to resign in the face of allegations I do not believe to be true.

I understand the to and fro of Question Period, but accusing people of being criminals when there is an investigation going on is wrong. I call on the Honourable Members on the other side of the House to stop attacking people in this manner. It is unfair to them and to their families, no matter who they are or what party they belong to.

I will continue to be questioned by the opposition and the media and I will respond in the Legislature and in public. I will continue to fully co-operate with the authorities.

But none of that is at the heart of my work, which is to ensure we continue to invest in people, to build roads, bridges and transit, to create a dynamic business environment and give people financial security in retirement. That's why I'm in politics.

Kathleen Wynne is premier of Ontario.

## 'Tis the season of preparation

Let's hope the province doesn't choke on the booze file



DEIRDRE PIKE

What a welcome relief it is to see the sun getting up earlier these days and bringing its hopeful light to my morning routine.

This time of year seems to embrace its opposing messages of longer days yet oppressive cold; barren trees with spring bulbs at their feet, not long away from bursting through the ground; light meets darkness; hope walks with despair. Each exists hand in hand throughout the year but I see it more clearly as winter moves toward spring.

In the Christian calendar it is now the season of Lent, coming from the word "lengthen" as in these new days spreading out before us. These 40 days that mark the time of preparation for Easter move around on the calendar but always fall somewhere in the messy months of February, March and April.

Blankets of white snow melt away to reveal clumps of dirty brown ice packed like cement amid the litter and leaves of last year along with unscooped poop that has been so nicely veiled.

As usual, I welcome this time of preparation as another opportunity for aligning my life a little more closely to my soul, finding joy in taking on new routines and freedom in giving up habits that bind me.

As usual I will try to do more — more kindness, more prayer, more charity. And as usual I will try to do less — less judging, less eating and less drinking. It is no longer "Miller time" in our household.

So with that in mind, I was not upset to read that the Ontario government is not rushing ahead to provide us with more access to booze in this province. I get enough, thank you, and don't need one stop-shopping for food and drink.

As Target learned recently, Canadians don't mind spending their frigid days heading from one store to the next.

I always enjoy seeing my regular shopping buddies at Fortinos and then meeting up with them minutes later at the convenient side-by-side venues of the Dundurn LCBO and The Beer Store.

However, looking at online commenting on this issue, apparently I am part of the Victorian era and should remove my corset and allow whoever wants to sell booze the opportunity to do so.

I have taken off my corset and yet I am still quite happy with having government controls on alcohol provided it makes good decisions. So last spring when Finance Minister Charles Sousa sounded confident that Ontario drinkers would have access to 10 grocery stores with LCBO kiosks from which to choose their bevies, I thought that seemed like a reasonable pilot project.

However, other decisions they've made while wielding control have not been as reasonable.

It has now been uncovered how much all government parties were profiting from the quasi-monopoly created at The Beer Store, with donations from brewers and unions alike. With this big reveal, there is a move underfoot to revoke that monopoly but it won't come easily with NAFTA regulations and messy lawsuits being threatened, mainly by Belgian-headquartered Labatt's.

That scares the UFCW representing 6,000 Beer Store workers with good union jobs.

Over at the LCBO there seems to be a lack of commitment on the part of the government to ensuring good jobs with living wages.

Over at the LCBO there seems to be a lack of commitment on the part of the government to ensure living wage jobs. OPSEU has a challenge before the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario over wages paid to its retail workers, most of whom are female. According to OPSEU, the LCBO deliberately classifies its regular year-round customer service workers as "casual" so it can pay them less than their co-workers who are doing the same job but are classified as "permanent."

Kathleen Wynne acknowledges things have changed in Ontario's alcohol landscape and there is a need for a "bigger discussion" on how we sell our spirits. The LCBO kiosk project is on hold and she has contracted a former TD Bank bigwig, Ed Clark, to lead a discussion on how to make good changes at the LCBO and The Beer Store for all Ontarians.

Like this season, it will be messy, but I live in hope for a crisp, clean quaff of fairness at the end of it all.

Deirdre Pike is a freelance columnist for the Hamilton Spectator. She is living Lent beer-free in Hamilton's Strathcona neighbourhood. She can be reached at [dpikethespec@gmail.com](mailto:dpikethespec@gmail.com) or @deirdrepik.

## One day, my story may be yours

I was barely in kindergarten when my loved one ended her life



THOMAS FROESE

KAMPALA, UGANDA — He was Swiss and we were talking over coffee and he said he'd just read my story about Canada's new look at assisted suicide. He spoke as if I'd written on this, which I had not, or maybe he called it my story simply because I'm Canadian.

He said he didn't know what all the fuss was about. Europe, after all, liberated itself from any shameful baggage on assisted suicide long ago. If you want to die, he explained, you can easily go to places and doctors for help.

Yes, Europe got its enlightened look at doing yourself in at least as far back as Goethe when, much to his later regret, the young German philosopher wrote *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, a semi-autobiographical novel of a sensitive and love-sick young man who wore yellow pants and a blue topcoat.

Werther had fallen hopelessly into the pain of unrequited love and eventually reasoned the only escape to happiness and freedom was to shoot himself in the head. After Goethe's novel took off, more than a few young Germans were found strewn across the country in the same colourful attire with self-inflicted bullets to the head. It became fashionable.

This is freedom, one of those words that gets rather threadbare when overused, one of those great ideals that can turn into a distasteful parody of itself.

No, it seems to me that even the most free of us aren't entirely free, any more than the happiest among us are entirely happy. This is because this world, even at its best, is a gilded cage, one that points to the hope and truth that there must be

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something more eternally satisfying elsewhere.

I didn't say this to my Swiss friend. Nor did I suggest Canadians will now run around in yellow pants and blue topcoats to go and exit life stage-right. I said nothing on happiness or Goethe or bullets to the brain or even what I might know about unrequited love.

Neither did I say anything about the mystery of suffering, how suffering refines some people like gold — see it here in Africa — while others just get hardened like iron or cheap-sounding like tin.

Instead, I wondered aloud about Canadian courts lording it over elected officials and how Ottawa might now somehow craft a reasonable law that still considers citizens who are hurting and vulnerable, Canadians who won't always have the power or well-being to choose life for themselves.

Then I told my Swiss friend about a loved one from my own family who was so horribly sick that she ended her life one dark day in her Berlin apartment — I was barely in kindergarten — and how I have no doubt that, in her deep depression and inability to think clearly, she would have asked a doctor for help to kill herself if it were legal then.

Yes, just who will protect these people from themselves? Who will protect them also from certain doctors now more interested in just another method of expedient billing than medicine's centuries-old oath to preserve life?

When I told my Swiss friend about my dead loved one — she was my mother — his eyes welled up. I had shared more than he wanted, I suppose. Maybe he also sensed other things, important but hidden things, that didn't need to be spoken.

This is my story. It's what I'm married to, for better or worse. It's my song. Life for family survivors of suicide may go on somehow, even with great hope and healing, but it's never without scars. Many families never fully recover.

Now and then I have moments when I wonder what she, my dead mother, might want to say to me, even in moments like this. This too is a mystery.

"I'm sorry. Will you forgive me? The view is so different from here," is what I'm imagining. Or is it just my imagination? "I want you to open your eyes. Life is a gift. Live it with joy, even knowing that suffering is a part of it too. Now sing it with every last breath you're given."

Do you hear it? Because this is not just my story anymore. Soon it might be yours.

Author and journalist Thomas Froese is a Hamiltonian living in East Africa. Read him at [www.dailydad.net](http://www.dailydad.net) and [www.thomasfroese.com](http://www.thomasfroese.com)



## BRIEFLY

Short and excerpted comments sent to [letters@thespec.com](mailto:letters@thespec.com)

## Saving face at taxpayers' expense

The computerized Social Assistance Management System still does not work properly. I always thought it was normal to falter or err sometimes as long as we learned from our mistakes. It seems that politically, this is not the case. Saving face, appearing to be right and giving the impression of knowing what is best is the new think of the present day leaders be it at a local, provincial or federal level.

Most rational people would stop using a system or device that wasn't working and costing a fortune to continue but in this case, it might appear that they were wrong or incompetent. I guess it really doesn't matter, since they believe it's their right to spend anyone else's (taxpayer's) money regardless and not their own. It's criminal that this is allowed to go on and possibly some day they will realize we see this behaviour and know why they do it. For me, it takes a wiser person and greater leader to admit to errors than to hide behind lies and denial while frivolously wasting valuable resources pretending to be noble. ROBERT PANCHYSON, BURLINGTON

## Who will pay for bad software?

With regard to the failure of the new social assistance computer system, who is accountable? Who decided who would be awarded this contract? Who won this contract to supply the system in the first place? Who is going to pay the cost of "as much as \$300,000" for an independent review? Who is going to actually fix this fiasco? It better be the firm that developed this dysfunctional software. If not, the people behind the decision need to provide a good explanation as to why this outcome happened in the first place. GLYNIS VAN STEEN, BURLINGTON

## Let's preserve, not bury history

I agree with a previous letter writer. I think that the long overdue completion of the Freeman Station in Burlington or the Dundas Valley Station would be an excellent new home for David Lee's miniature labour of love. As seems to be the new trend in Hamilton, let's preserve, not bury, our history. MATT BONDZIO, BURLINGTON