

At what point?

By Bill Kilpatrick

During the conversation that I had with incumbent MPP Ric Bresee he made a comment about what he expects of his constituents. He said, "I hope they continue to hold my toes to the fire." Okie dokie, just one moment while I grab some matches and kindling. Before I begin, I just want to say that Bresee appears to be a genuine person and a nice guy with an excellent sense of humour, but his government's policies are so out of touch with the reality of Ontarians that we honestly cannot afford more Ford, pun intended.

During our conversation Bresee spoke about working with lower tier municipalities and counties to find solutions to homelessness pointing out that "it is a partnership" adding that "We need to make sure that they have the money to do these things" the true solutions need to come from the local people. People in Bancroft want an end to homelessness. Period. But his government is not implementing policies that are addressing this issue. While he may be listening to his constituents his government is clearly not hearing what municipalities, counties, and local people are saying and that's: properly fund us so we can end this crisis.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario, AMO, recently put out a study that they did on homelessness that stated the following: "Ontario is at a tipping point in its homelessness crisis. More than 80,000 Ontarians were known to be homeless in 2024, a number that has grown by more than 25 per cent since 2022. Without significant intervention, homelessness in Ontario could double in the next decade, and reach nearly 300,000 people in an economic downturn. "The scope and scale of homelessness across Ontario's municipalities is truly staggering," said Robin Jones, AMO President. "Without real and meaningful provincial action, the quality of life and economic prosperity of Ontario's communities is at risk. We can solve this crisis, but we need to work together."

Currently the warming centre in Bancroft is open seven days a week from 8p.m. to 8 a.m. and that's it. No matter how cold it is through the day, those who are unhoused are expected to find shelter somewhere else. I asked Hastings County CAO Connor Dorey why the warming centre cannot be open longer especially during cold periods, like in Simcoe County? His answer was pretty clear: there is not enough money from the province to keep it open beyond its current hours. Dorey said, "Hastings County does not have the funds available to expand its operations of the warming centre by four hours a day. This year Hastings County has expanded operations of its warming centres by 15 days in comparison to past years, and this year are operating the Bancroft warming Centre from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m., versus last years 9 p.m. to 7 a.m., an extension of two hours nightly.

In regard to your question related to Simcoe County, it is important to highlight that Simcoe County receives over \$21,000,000 from the province annually through its homelessness prevention program, where as Hastings County receives approximately \$6,100,000.

When I asked Bresee about the fact that the money from the Homeless Prevention Fund did not increase this year despite the increase in need, his response was that that they increased it last year by \$2.2 million. His exact words were, "I think a 50 per cent or 40 plus per cent increase, I forget what the exact number was, in one year and carried to the next year is good?"

Well, I don't think it's good, and so do a great many other people, and it's clearly not enough since homelessness has grown by 25 per cent in Ontario since 2022 under the conservative government's watch. When I held his toes to the fire regarding this inadequate funding, he threw the County and the municipalities under the bus stating that it was an allocation issue and not a funding issue. He said "These are municipal decisions both at the County level and the lower tier municipalities as far as how those programs need to work. We have tremendously increased the homelessness prevention funding program." That's true, but just an FYI, it's tremendously not enough.

When it comes to taxpayer money and how it's allocated Bresee said, "We know that this is not government money this is taxpayer money, this is your money and we need to make sure that we are doing the absolute best with every penny we spend of it. And wherever possible lower the taxes, give you your money back because you're better off to decide what to do with that money than we are." I don't remember being consulted about the \$200 cheques and whether I thought that this was a proper allocation of taxpayer money given the crisis in our municipalities and the homelessness crisis. I also don't remember being consulted about your

government's decision to end the license plate sticker program. A program that brought in some \$1.1 billion per year into the provincial coffers.

The AMO report cited above made some suggestions on how the provincial government could end homelessness stating that "An estimated additional \$11 billion over 10 years could end chronic homelessness by boosting the supply of affordable housing, improving transitional and supportive services, and enhancing prevention programs. An additional \$2 billion over 8 years could largely eliminate encampments."

Here's a suggestion on how to better allocate my money. Listen to AMO. Reinstate the license plate sticker program and put all that money towards ending homelessness. Ending the license plate program saved Ontarians some \$120 dollars per year or \$2.31 per week. I think? no, I know, that every Ontarian can afford \$2.31 cents per week and would agree to do that help out their fellow Ontarians.

According to the stats on the Little Blue Cabins web page, an organization that is attempting to eliminate homelessness, it seems that the allocation problem is at the provincial level and not at the municipal level or the County level. The stats on the Web page state that the cost to house an unhoused person is between \$14,000 to \$21,000, but the cost to not house an unhoused person is between \$45,000 to \$57,000. The more people who go unhoused the more it costs Ontarians. It's in our interests, both economically and ethically to house the unhoused.

Bresee said that in 2018, "the revenue level for the province of Ontario was about \$152 billion. It's now \$206 billion. The revenue levels are increasing because we're seeing increased economic activity." This may be true, but ask your self are things getting better for the average Ontarian? I don't care which metric you use to measure how well the economy is doing, when there is a 25 per cent increase in homelessness during your term in office that says it all about how well the economy is doing and your government's priorities, does it not? At what point do we finally vote them out and get some people first policies in place?