

Protesters attend Port Hope event

Premier asked to address concerns over buses and funding cuts

By **Brianne Ste Marie Lacroix** and **Taylor Hermiston**

Dozens of school buses and protesters took to Queen Street in Port Hope to address Premier Kathleen Wynne with their concerns on the current battle over school bus contracts and funding cuts at the Northumberland Child Development Centre.

Wynne visited Port Hope to be the guest speaker at the Port Hope and District Chamber of Commerce annual general meeting. Her primary agenda was her plan for jobs and economic growth across the province.

“We are very pleased with the job numbers today, but we need that to be a trend. We need that to continue. I use the example of SISCO, with 5,000 jobs coming to Ontario because of our education system and our highly skilled work force,” said Wynne.

Upon her arrival at the Capitol Theatre, many protesters confronted Wynne on two issues.

Lisa Howie said she participated in the protest because her family owns Ellwood Hamilton Bus Lines. They have 65 buses and brought five of them to the protest. Their business has been operating for 45 years. If the Ministry of Education approves a new way of contracting school buses, there might be a significant impact on the smaller businesses.

“If the Liberals are going to put this RFP (request for proposal) through, it will be big corporations replacing the family-run businesses and we’re worried,” said Howie.

Michelle Higginson was protesting another issue altogether. The Five Counties Children’s Centre would become the provider of special needs resourcing services throughout the county. This was caused by the switching of services from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to the Ministry of Education, which severed funding for the home visits. Higginson is the chair-



Photo by Brianne Ste Marie Lacroix

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne discussed job creation and economic growth in the province at the Port Hope District Chamber of Commerce last Friday in Port Hope. She was greeted by dozens of protesters outside of Port Hope’s Capitol Theatre.

woman of the Northumberland Special Needs Children Parent Advocacy Group.

“We want to get across to her that because of the change in the funding, we now have over 400 local special needs children on a waiting list for home visits,” said Higginson.

Northumberland Child Development Centre used to work with families that have special needs children and, until

the cutbacks, offered home visits. It is a family inclusive service, which is very important when you have children with special needs, said Higginson, adding the whole family needs to learn how to deal with those issues.

Since the funding change, only 80 out of 400 children from the list will get home services because the severed funding.

These cuts hit close to home for the

Higginson family because they have an adopted son at home with special needs. If it had not been for the home visits, she said, their family might not have made it through.

“It’s hard when you have a special needs child of your own because you need to find care, whether they are in school or working,” said Todd Higginson.

Along with the cuts, there were significant job reductions in the local

Northumberland Child Development Centre.

Wynne stopped to speak to the protesters about these issues before entering the Capitol Theatre to give her speech.

“I committed to both groups that I will be taking their concerns back and working with our ministers,” said Wynne.

For a multi-media look at this story, go to: <http://www.qnetnews.ca/?p=34357>

Make sure your kids are safe in the snow

By **Melyssa Gloude**

Yards, driveways and parking lots have accumulated about three feet of snow throughout the season, and in some of the ploughed parking lots, snowbanks have reached a towering 20-feet high.

This weather has left the area with reduced visibility for drivers, and a winter wonderland for children – an understandable concern for parents.

Pat McNulty, Belleville’s manager of transportation, said he feels his staff is doing an excellent job with snow removal this year.

“I’ve been here for six years and I’ve never seen snow like this,” said McNulty.

After December’s ice storm, regular snow removal has proven a little more difficult for McNulty and his staff.

“It takes 48 hours if not longer to clear sidewalks. With the piles so high, it’s been taking a lot longer,” he said.

“We put out an announcement on the city’s website, to make sure drivers watch for children. People have to be more aware when there’s this much snow.”

Parents of young children in the area think differently of the announcement.

“It’s unrealistic. The snow piles are everywhere,” said Christi Baker, mother to four-year-old Haven.

“And kids are kids! They’re assuming parents listen and teach their kids, and that their kids will listen.”

Baker, who’s also a student midwife, said education is the best way to make sure children can stay safe, and still have fun in the snow.

“I know that I’m concerned, because



Photo by Garbrielle Smith

Alex Karsnoyarsky, 13, climbs the snow mound on Lake Court in late January. The snowbank has since been plowed as it posed a safety risk to drivers.

children can so easily fall and break a limb. When it comes to skating and tobogganing, a simple helmet can go a long way,” she said.

“I also talk to [Haven] a lot about watching for vehicles that may be

about to back out.”

Baker said that making simple rules for children to follow and explaining to them in terms they understand is the most effective way to keep them safe.

“If the snowbank is taller than you, don’t climb on it. Teach your kids to make eye contact with drivers, not just in winter.

“It’s certainly tough sometimes, but the best thing to do is taking the time to

teach your kids.”

Natacha Boulanger is a mother of four children – eight-year-old Toby, six-year-old Kira, four-year-old Ember and 13-month-old Lucien.

She said that the winter weather is making her anxious for the safety of her children playing outdoors. That doesn’t stop her from letting them play on the snowbanks, however.

“I don’t think we should stop children from doing things that are possibly dangerous,” said Boulanger.

“But they need to have an idea of the dangers to grasp what happens if you don’t follow safety rules.”

Bridgette LaBelle, a daycare provider and mother to four-year-old Bella and seven-year-old Miranda, said that she doesn’t share the same concern for her children in her suburban neighbourhood.

“We have a ‘snow mountain’ in our cul-de-sac. It’s the main play area for kids,” said LaBelle.

“I can see the cars before they come in. The piles on the street are a different story, if kids are playing on the side of road, of course it could be really dangerous.”

“If parents aren’t watching their children, anything can happen,” she said.

“But it can also happen if they are watching them.”

“It’s frustrating to me because I was raised to be outside playing and living without crazy restrictions,” said LaBelle, who strives for a happy medium with her daughters.

“I try to let my girls live like that as much as I can.”

Write for Rights campaign addresses human rights issues

By **Melyssa Gloude**

“I think about people who are under threat,” said Mieke Thorne, the media relations spokesperson for Belleville’s Amnesty International Group 111.

“I think about how I would feel if I was in prison for not having done anything. It’s for people to know they are not alone.”

Tuesday morning at the Belleville Public Library, the Belleville community’s chapter of Amnesty International gathered for the now-monthly urgent action letter-writing campaign, Write For Rights.

The campaign is considered one of the world’s biggest letter-writing events, according to Amnesty International. Cases involving the infringement of human rights are selected and distributed amongst international chapters. Anyone who chooses to do so may write a letter to the government of the human rights case of choice.

The goal, according to Amnesty International’s website, is that the collective action on these cases will “put massive pressure on governments to respond positively” to Amnesty’s plea to improve

human rights.

“It’s hard to imagine that people in the world are imprisoned just for speaking out,” said Thorne, referring to the numerous amounts of available cases, with crimes ranging from blasphemy to mental illness which have possible penalties such as prison time or even torture.

“We do what we can. We can talk, if we want. We can criticize. We write as many letters as we can to these governments to make changes.”

The list of current urgent action cases include the contact information for govern-

ment officials in Mexico, Myanmar, Palestine, Belarus, Russia, Nigeria and Canada.

“These are prisoners of conscience, these are people who have never used any violence,” said Thorne.

The Belleville chapter of Amnesty International has been active in our community for over thirty years, according to Thorne. Times are changing, however, and speaking out against these human rights infringements has become more accessible.

“Amnesty is letter writing. We try to make a change because the more letters that are being written, the government

will notice that everyone else notices what they’re doing,” said Thorne.

The Amnesty International website reports over two million letters written world-wide, with posted testimonies from released prisoners. The most recent prisoner released on bail was Yorm Bopha, a Cambodian land rights activist who openly opposed to development around Boeung Kak lake. She was sentenced to three years’ imprisonment for “intentional violence with aggravating circumstances” and released on Nov. 22, 2013.