

# NDP drives auto insurance agenda

By MIKE BEGGS

Continuing her call for a 15 per cent reduction in auto insurance rates, Ontario NDP leader Andrea Horwath made a pass through Brampton in late April to speak with frustrated motorists, accompanied by NDP Consumer Critic Jagmeet Singh, MPP for Bramalea-Gore-Malton.

Her itinerary took her to the Pearson International Airport taxi and limousine compound and That Italian Place restaurant, before hosting a Round Table at the Brampton Board Of Trade.

The NDP's much-publicized motion for a 15 per cent drop in driver premiums was passed by the Legislature on March 27, and Horwath hopes to see it included in the imminent Liberal budget (not yet passed as of our deadline).

She notes that while Ontario has the highest auto rates in the country, since the government changed the rules in 2010 to help insurance companies, they've been saving \$2 billion per year.

"People in Brampton (and across Ontario)

depend on their cars to get them to work, and to get their kids to school. Skyrocketing auto insurance premiums are putting a strain on family budgets," she offers. "If the government can give insurance companies a break, then the Premier should give good drivers a break, too."

"We're hearing lots of positive talk, but now the rubber has to hit the road. Insurance companies have seen their costs reduced. Now, it's time to give the Financial Services Commission a mandate to lower rates by 15 per cent over the next year."

In 2011, the Auditor General looked into the province's auto insurance system and the high rates, and raised questions about whether the government was doing enough to protect consumers. He suggested the Financial Service Commission's (FISCO) approach was likely out-of-date, and driving up premiums. FISCO commissioned two outside consultants to study the issue and report back early this year – but has not released the report.

Singh says Ontarians deserve to see this report. The Ontario Trial Lawyers

Association is also calling on the government to release it.

"Ontario drivers are paying the highest auto insurance premiums in Canada. Their government should be sharing the facts, not burying them," he states. "When are we going to get some answers?"

"If the cost of insuring a car has gone down, why are drivers paying more?"

While the proposed 15 per cent rate reduction has, heretofore, been focused on private cars, the NDP now wants this to apply to commercial drivers as well -- like GTA cabbies who are always subject to high rates, and have recently been shellshocked by an insurance crisis. With one of the major underwriters opting not to renew 2,500 GTA policies earlier this year, many taxi drivers have been forced to scramble for coverage with other brokers, resort to exorbitant "facility" insurance (at around \$14,000 and up), or in some cases, simply walk away from the business.

Horwath says she has been hearing from cabbies, including those in her home turf of Hamilton.

"They're really upset, the rates are so high – sometimes twice as high as in other areas," she reports.

Vijay Sovti, a director with the Airport Taxicab Association, which represents approximately 600 taxi and limo drivers at

Pearson Airport, agrees the government must turn its eye to commercial insurance, as well.

"Our drivers are really upset," he says. "This time they were lucky to get our renewals, but looking forward the future is not very good. We hear stories from Toronto about drivers having trouble getting insurance and huge rates being charged."

"And we're not talking about the rates only, it's the way they run commercial insurance. Any time the driver is in an accident, they're like killers, even if the driver is not at fault."

Airport driver deductibles have been hiked to \$2500 for Liability, and \$1000 for Not At Fault.

"It's a huge stress," adds long-time limo driver Tehnaz Mistry. "I hope the three governments will work together. This is what hurts Ontarians."

She stresses that suburbs like Brampton and Mississauga have evolved into boomtowns over the past 40 years, with families having gone from one to several cars in the drive.

"This affects every person in Ontario. Everybody has to get insurance to drive from work to home," she says. "And yet, they're ripping us off. The demand is so high, and yet our premiums are getting jacked. After 9-11, everybody's insurance went up. Well, when does it come down?"

## Hoteliers helping the homeless

The staff at Crowne Plaza Toronto Airport are pulling on their jeans to put an end to youth homelessness in Toronto as part of their year-long commitment to support Youth Without Shelter, a local youth shelter and support program. A dress-down day called Toonie Friday, where hotel staff are encouraged to donate a toonie to wear jeans each Friday, is just one of the several initiatives planned for the year.

"We are so happy to see our staff engaged and committed to helping end youth homelessness in our community, and we're thrilled to support Youth Without Shelter's great work," said Fariyal Hope, general manager of Crowne Plaza Toronto Airport.

In addition to holding other fundraisers including car washes, bake sales and BBQs, Crowne Plaza prepares and serves monthly hot breakfasts for youth at the shelter, donates meeting space for Youth Without

Shelter meetings, and will prepare and serve a special Thanksgiving dinner for youth at the shelter in the fall.

Crowne Plaza Toronto Airport has also scheduled large quarterly drives for food, hygiene products, school supplies and holiday gifts for youth staying at the shelter, and are encouraging hotel guests and local businesses to participate.



L to R: General manager Fariyal Hope, Front Office Manager Elena Naryjnaia and Guest Services Manager Mariel Barbaza.

Thank You  
for the nomination!

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