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**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Committee business

1st Session
42nd Parliament
Friday 14 May 2021

**Comité permanent
des finances
et des affaires économiques**

Travaux du comité

1^{re} session
42^e législature
Vendredi 14 mai 2021

Chair: Amarjot Sandhu
Clerk: Julia Douglas

Président : Amarjot Sandhu
Greffière : Julia Douglas

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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
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Toronto ON M7A 1A2
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Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Friday 14 May 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Vendredi 14 mai 2021

The committee met at 1500 in room 151 and by video conference.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good afternoon, everyone. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to order. We don't have any members present in the committee room. The following members we have participating remotely: MPP Cho, MPP Fife, MPP Hunter, MPP Kanapathi, MPP Mamakwa, MPP Roberts, MPP Smith, MPP Gates, MPP Bouma, and that's it.

We're also joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard, and broadcast and recording.

Please speak slowly and clearly, and wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. Since it could take a little time for your audio and video to come up after I recognize you, please take a brief pause before beginning. As always, all comments should go through the Chair.

Are there any questions before we begin? Seeing none, we are here to consider our committee process with respect to Bill 288, An Act to enact the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021. Can we have a motion? MPP Cho?

Mr. Stan Cho: I move that committee enter closed session for the purposes of organizing committee business and that broadcasting staff can be permitted to remain in the closed session meeting for the purposes of operating the electronic meeting technology.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): A motion has been moved by MPP Cho. Is there any debate? MPP Fife?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know that the government feels that it's okay to continually move these discussions around how public consultation will be happening on Bill 288 and other pieces of legislation into in camera, but once again I must protest. I consistently protest this lack of transparency.

This piece of legislation, Bill 288, is very important for the economy of the province of Ontario. I think it's important that the trades and all concerned parties hear how we are going to decide on how to consult on this piece of legislation. Our critic has been very clear in the House, just this past week, when he had a one-hour lead on the legislation that—it dropped on a Friday and we were debating it on a Monday. We want to make sure that Bill 288 truly reflects what the building trades and what the

apprenticeship program requires. I know that some of us have been scrambling just to get some feedback.

But I'm going to give you five really good reasons why this discussion around how we're going to go clause-by-clause and do consultation on Bill 288 should happen. One of the concerns that we've heard, Chair, is that the overlap of trade jurisdictional disputes should be handled by the OLRB as the third party. I would like to hear from informed voices on that issue.

The other piece that we have heard is that Bill 288 does not name the construction trades in the compulsory trades or the non-compulsory trades. This is probably by design so the government can get the trades later or go back to skill sets.

Bill 288 also—this is the third reason—still leaves possibilities of future skill-setting. Now, breaking up the trades into skill sets and not recognizing trade qualifications and the apprenticeship system would really run counter to the language that we've heard from informed voices.

Fourth, the non-compulsory trades can do an overlap, as the legislation is currently written, of compulsory trade work. So, unlicensed trades can do licensed trades work. I just want to say that again: Unlicensed trades can do licensed trades work, as the legislation is crafted right now.

Then, fifth, trade boards need to be in the legislation with stronger language. Trade boards should be filled with qualified people familiar with the industry, trade, training curriculum and training standards. I know that the members of the finance committee know this, as does the minister, but these trade boards have been standard practice in the past, boots-on-the-ground reporting and keeping government informed and accountable regardless of what government is in power.

Let's just have this conversation out in the public, who we work for. They have the right to hear from us and why we're rationalizing the process, be it an extensive consultation process or a very short and limited consultation process. I really don't understand why the government continually does this each and every time. We are adamantly against moving the discussion around consulting Bill 288 behind closed doors. It does not strengthen our democracy.

I thank you for your time.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Gates?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you. Can you hear me okay?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. Thank you, Chair. Obviously, I would like to say that my colleague MPP Fife is right on the money. I'm actually really disappointed by MPP Cho on this issue, on not wanting this to be open and in public. As you know, because I think you were at some of the debate on this bill, this bill was given to me at 3 o'clock on a Thursday afternoon before the weekend on Mother's Day, and we haven't had a lot of opportunity, even at this point in time, to talk to a lot of the skilled tradespeople that are in this bill and are going to be affected by this bill and, I believe, really affected by the bill.

There are concerns around the board makeup: the chair is going to be appointed; we're going to have 11 board members. It's not saying that it's going to be made up of a higher percentage of trades, that there are going to be women, there are going to be First Nations, whoever's going to be on the board—nothing is made up on the board.

The \$18 million, quite frankly, that went from the College of Trades—I'd like to know where it is. What are you doing with it? How is that going to do—how is the fee structure going to work? How is it going to work for compulsory trades, non-compulsory trades? There are so many things that I want to talk about.

What have you got to hide here? Why do you not want the public to hear this debate? Why do you not want the trades to hear what we're talking about right now on what's important to them? If you're telling me—and you have; every day, almost, for the last two weeks—how important the trades are to the province of Ontario, how important they are to the overall health of this economy, how important they are as we bounce back from COVID-19, whether it be in infrastructure projects around hospitals, roads, schools, and you're saying how important they are, yet you want everything to be in camera, which is basically—nobody sees anything. Quite frankly, I think it's disrespectful, not only to the public but I really think to the skilled trades. It's extremely disappointing and disrespectful to every one of those trades and every one of those unions that have put faith in you and, quite frankly, have come out in supporting this, just saying you are heading in the right direction. I think you're heading in the wrong direction, but that's just me and obviously it would be my job to prove that. But at the end of the day, you don't want them to hear this debate. I don't understand it.

We see this more and more with this government. It doesn't matter what committee it's on. This is what we're seeing: go in camera; nobody hears the debate; nobody hears what we're doing. Why would you want that? Do you really want to be transparent, open and transparent, or do you want to hide everything you guys are doing? I think it's actually disgraceful.

And other questions that haven't been answered: You talk about the fact that we're going to be short 100,000 tradespeople because a lot of the tradespeople are 55 and over. The question to me is, have you talked to the business? How many businesses have committed to hiring the apprentices? That's something that's not in the bill.

There's nothing in the bill that talks about that. There's nothing in the bill about how you're going to hire more women.

So I'm saying the same as my colleague: We're not going to support going behind closed doors and not allowing anybody to hear the debate and showing total disrespect to the province of Ontario, total disrespect to tradespeople, total disrespect to the young kids that may think that they want to get into the trades; they would like to hear more about it, but, no, you want to put it behind closed doors. It's disgraceful.

I think all you Conservative MPPs that are supporting this bill should be ashamed of yourselves. You are going to have to go face the skilled trades, who you're trying to lobby. You're trying to say that, "Hey, this is a wonderful bill. This is the best bill that's happened to the trades in 20 years. The College of Trades was a farce. It was terrible." That's what you are saying, yet you won't stand here and defend it in the open and in the public. So I'm saying to all the MPPs that are on this committee, it's disgraceful that the first thing you started in this committee was to go behind closed doors. You should all be ashamed of yourselves.

Thanks for the time, Chair. I appreciate it.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Cho has his hand up first, and then I'll go to MPP Hunter after that. MPP Cho.

Mr. Stan Cho: There are some strong words there from my colleagues across the way, Chair, but as we've seen in the finance committee—well, over this entire very difficult year for Ontarians—our government has been very open and transparent. That's going to continue and stakeholders are going to have their say, absolutely. Public consultation is hugely important, as we have demonstrated in this committee time in and time out, and it's simply false, to the allegations of the member from Niagara Falls, that we're not going to be consulting.

Moving into closed session, as we have done in this finance committee over the last year, is simply to discuss scheduling and administration. The public deputations—well, they will absolutely be transparent, and there will be lots of discussion fully available to the public. But I don't think the public needs to hear about scheduling and admin, and that is why we are suggesting to move a motion to move into closed session, again, as I said, as we have done many, many times in this committee.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I do think it is important to have these discussions in an open and transparent way, particularly on this topic of the skilled trades and how critical they are to Ontario's economy, the labour force in Ontario and the labour force to come. One aspect that we know is needed in the skilled trades is to have more diverse people become part of our skilled trades, across all of them. How are we going to address that? To have more women in the trades is of such critical importance. When we think about getting Ontario back on track coming out of COVID, women's participation and the she-covery is extremely important.

One of the recommendations that I have is, how are we outreaching to those who are impacted by this bill so that they know they can come before this committee and have their input, finding ways to improve this bill that really speak to those who are most affected? I don't think it is good enough just to post it on the Ontario Legislative Assembly site and hope that people will know there is an opportunity. I think when it comes to the skilled trades, it's too important, and we should be reaching out to those stakeholders. The ministry has that information, and I know that, because I am the former minister for skills development in the province. There should be a proactive outreach to the sector, the entire sector, including those labour unions that represent the trades, those that teach and attract people into the trades and apprenticeship as well as pre-apprenticeship programs. They should be aware that there is this bill, this very important bill, that sets out the framework; it's being discussed, and they should have an opportunity to input into it.

That's the main point I wanted to say, that this doesn't cover all of the things that are needed, and we want to hear from those who are most affected so that we can get this right.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further debate? Seeing none, are the members ready to vote? MPP Fife, do you have—yes?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you. I just wanted to request a recorded vote, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Sure. A recorded vote has been requested. Are the members ready to vote?

Ayes

Bouma, Stan Cho, Kanapathi, Roberts, Dave Smith.

Nays

Fife, Gates, Hunter, Mamakwa.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I declare the motion carried. We'll be going into a closed session now, but in order to do that, we need to recess for two minutes so that the staff can prepare to go to closed session. We'll recess for two minutes, and we'll come back at 3:16. Thank you.

The committee recessed at 1514 and later continued in closed session.

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